

# CINEFANTASTIQUE

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## ROCKETEER

**TERMINATOR 2**  
Cyborg Dons White Hat

**BILL & TED  
GO TO HELL**  
Hot Summer Preview!

**CHILD'S PLAY 3**  
Whack! Chucky's Back

**SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**  
Filming the Shocking Surprise Hit!

**HORROR'S JAMES DEAN**  
Tragic Director Michael Reeves

Volume 22 Number 1



Voigt

# THE PIT & THE PENDULUM

A Bizarre descent into Hell  
from the director of *RE-ANIMATOR*



Nobody is safe from the deadly clutches of Torquemada. Nor can they flee his machines of ultimate terror: the razor-sharp pendulum poised over the inescapable pit of hell. Now, Stuart Gordon brings you his terrifying version of the classic Edgar Allan Poe tale, **THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM.**

**COMING IN JUNE ON VIDEOCASSETTE**

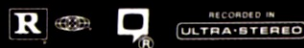
FULL MOON ENTERTAINMENT Presents A STUART GORDON Film "THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM"

Starring LANCE HENRIKSEN RONA DE RICCI JONATHAN FULLER JEFFREY COMBS TOM TOWLES STEVEN LEE WILLIAM NORRIS FRANCES BAY and OLIVER REED as the Cardinal Special Effects Makeup By GREG CANNOM

Director of Photography ADOLFO BARTOLI (A.I.C.) Art Director GIOVANNI NATALUCCI Costume Designer MICHELA GISOTTI Production Manager REMO LOMBARDO  
Music Composed And Conducted By RICHARD BAND Adapted From the Short Story By EDGAR ALLAN POE Written By DENNIS PAOLI Executive Producer CHARLES BAND

Produced By ALBERT BAND Directed By STUART GORDON

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The magazine with a "Sense of Wonder."

AUGUST, 1991

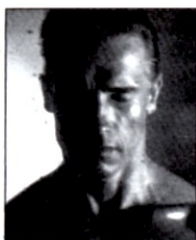
It's summer again, and time to scan the season's guilty pleasures—horror, fantasy and science fiction rendered in broad strokes, served up in big doses to hook a mass audience. Disney seems to have taken the most risks with **THE ROCKETEER**—who would have thought they'd ever resurrect the Rocketman of the bygone movie serials for a modern audience? We can only hope the movie will match the kinetic fun of the chapter-plays, without being quite as hokey.

Our cover story look at the making of **THE ROCKETEER** examines the obscure, underground comic book character on which the film is based, as well as its movie serials of yore that served as its inspiration. Comic creator Dave Stevens talks about giving the strip its nostalgic feel in lovingly rendered period details of '30s Los Angeles. Disney has wisely retained the period setting in production design by James Bissell, who recounts how he went about rivaling the spectacle of **RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK**. Director Joe Johnston, who helmed Disney's winning **HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS**, discusses the perils of being typed as a "comic book director." And there's a profile of Betty Page, the strip's controversial cheesecake bondage queen, dropped by Disney in a concession to lure family audiences.

Other summer previews include a look at the filming of **BILL & TED GO TO HELL**, the sequel to **BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE**, which examines the genesis of the valley-speaking, rock-playing idiots who created a sensation as the hip comedy team of the 1989 low-budget hit. **Chucky** is back for summer fun in **CHILD'S PLAY 3**, a profile of the filming that looks at updating the animatronics and shaking up the slash-and-stalk format of the killer doll horror franchise. And there's also a scoop on the super-secretive **TERMINATOR 2**, which has Hollywood abuzz over its escalating budget—it's rumored to cost \$1 million a minute!

So sit back and enjoy. If Hollywood has money to burn, let them worry!

Frederick S. Clarke



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**Publisher & Editor:** Frederick S. Clarke. **Bureaus:** New York/Dan Scapperotti. Los Angeles/Steve Biodrowski, Sheldon Teitelbaum.

London/Alan Jones. Toronto/Gary Kimber. **Contributors:** Thomas Doherty, Dennis K. Fischer, Todd French, Bill George,

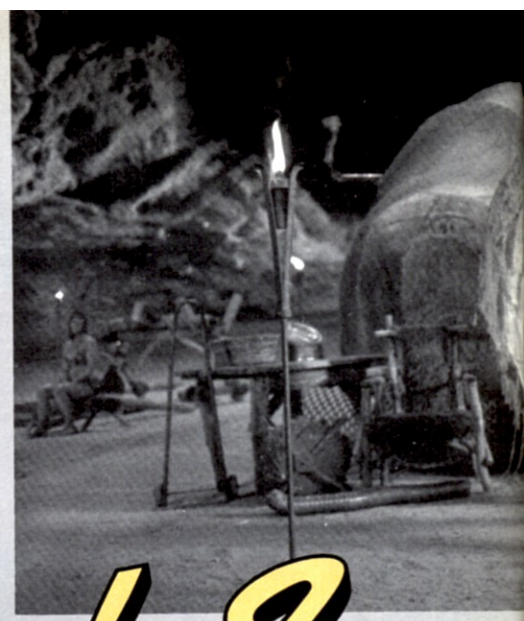
Judith P. Harris, Bill Kelley, Charles D. Leayman, Allen Malmquist, Dan Persons, Daniel Schweiger, John Thonen, Tim Vandehey, David Wilt

**Editorial Assistant:** Elaine Fiedler. **Publisher's Assistant:** Lisa A. Tomczak. **Circulation Assistant:** Ruth Kopala. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke.

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# Mom & Dad Save

More fun from the team that gave you BILL

By Steve Biodrowski

Ultra-slick or "realistic" scenery and effects are unnecessary. This doesn't need to cost much, or, for that matter, even look as though it does.

—Script note by Chris Matheson & Ed Solomon

MOM AND DAD SAVE THE WORLD screenwriters Chris Matheson and Ed Solomon (BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE) were concerned that their science fiction comedy would seem too expensive to film, so they took the unusual step of pointing out that a low-budget approach was acceptable, implying that the film could be

Denizens of planet Spengo, rebel girl Kathy Ireland with Wallace Shawn.



designed to look like a parody of cheap '50s science fiction. To their surprise, director Greg Beeman (LICENSE TO DRIVE) failed to take them at their word, and the production ended up far more extravagant than they imagined, foregoing the intended cheapness of an AMAZON WOMEN ON THE MOON in favor of a look inspired by the books of Dr. Seuss, the work of production designer Craig Stearns. Warner Bros plans to give the film a fall opening.

MOM AND DAD SAVE THE WORLD reunites producer Michael Phillips with actress Teri Garr, who first worked together on CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND. Garr plays the Mom of the title, a typical housewife who tries to rekindle some romance in her marriage by dragging her husband off for a vacation. Jeffrey Jones (BEETLEJUICE) is Dad, a passive man forced into the role of hero when he must rescue his wife from the evil clutches of the Emperor of the tiny planet Spengo. Jon Lovitz, formerly of SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, plays Emperor Tod Spengo (he renamed the planet after himself), whose plan to destroy Earth is briefly interrupted when he falls for Garr, whisked to Spengo in the

family station wagon. Other cast members include Eric Idle, Wallace Shawn, Dwier Brown, and Kathy Ireland.

Matheson and Solomon's original low-budget concept for MOM AND DAD SAVE THE WORLD placed the emphasis of their character-oriented script on its romantic comedy rather than its science fiction trappings. According to Solomon, "We thought it would be fun to have an Indiana Jones-type adventure but with your parents at the center. Then, of course, we needed a villain. So we came up with Tod Spengo, utterly pompous and lame, an exaggeration of how Chris and I feel about ourselves—completely pathetic and at the same time full of hot air."

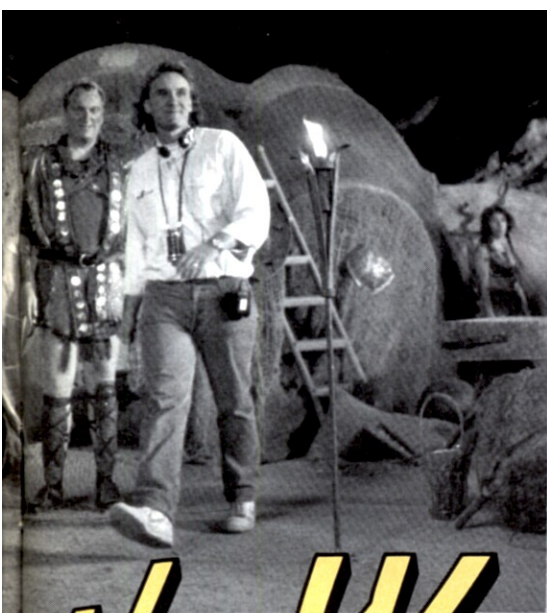
Spengo's planet is not described in much detail in the script, but the overall tone suggests one of those totalitarian worlds seen in QUEEN OF OUTER SPACE. "One of the reasons we chose a cheesy '50s look was we thought it might be cheaper," said Solomon. "We were afraid [prospective producers] would think it was too expensive."

The play failed to interest a major studio, even after the surprise success of BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE. "They said it was too

weird," recalled Solomon. "We thought maybe we'd gone over the top too much." After sitting on the shelf for several months, the script was given to low-budget producer Mike Erwin, Solomon's former karate teacher, who was looking for a project to break into the big leagues. Erwin placed the script with producer Michael Phillips, who secured financing and brought in Greg Beeman to direct.

"The mistake on this movie would have been to make it campy—I think that would have been most directors' first take on it," said Beeman. "I worked very hard to go against the grain of that. You have to acknowledge that it's a comedy, and you have to acknowledge what kind of comedy it is. It's like a Monty Python movie in a way—that's the closest comparison I can find—but it's very American, because of the characters. And the thing about the Python movies is that they're very elegantly staged. LIFE OF BRIAN is staged as if it were a Biblical epic. There's nothing about the production design or photography that would let you know it's silly.

"So that was very important to me—that we take the design and the visual approach of the movie seriously. There are



# the World

## & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE.

Comic adventures on the planet Spengo evoke the look of Dr. Seuss, courtesy of production design by Craig Stearns. Center: Director Greg Beeman and "Dad" Jeffrey Jones. Warner Bros is looking for a new title.

places where things are a little scary, and it's important to bring that out. There's a lot of emotional texture that the audience will feel, as well as visual texture. Ultimately, the most important thing is that it's funny, but on top of that it's a real love story."

It was this sentimental, "emotional texture" that attracted Beeman to the project. "When you read the script, Mom and Dad are like two people the writers captured from real life," he said. "It's tremendously uncynical. A lot of movies today have a very pessimistic, cynical edge to them. This is very good-hearted. I liked the fact that it's a love story about people who've been married twenty years—a couple whose relationship is falling apart until they go on this adventure. Their relationship has to be threatened for them to reach within themselves to become heroes, save the world, and fall in love with each other again.

"What was good about the script was that the characters and the dialogue were very strong. What it needed was more structure. As silly and outrageous as it is, it's a very mythic story. It's about a man who becomes a hero when he gets thrown into a heroic situation. It needed those archetyp-

al, mythic beats.

"It also needed visualization. There were a lot of sketchy things on the page. That was the most fun of all. This was a project where you could design an entire world that was funny. The idea I brought to it was using elements of Dr. Seuss. I got a bunch of Dr. Seuss books and looked at the architecture; all these big arches and stairs that go nowhere. I told the production designer, 'Everything should look like when kids build a tree house—they don't have a blueprint so they just start in one corner and build out.' It evolved beyond that, but I really think that is a starting point that hasn't been seen on film before."

Craig Stearns was excited about the possibilities suggested by Beeman's approach.

The rat living under the throne of Spengo—a puppet designed by makeup expert Tony Gardner—providing occasional wisecracks to counterpoint the film's action.



"The people of Spengo are supposed to be the stupidest in the universe, so it was fun building everything so that it had integrity within its stupidity," said the production designer. "The main hallway has that feeling, as if the whole thing's starting to fall over and they just put some braces in to prop it up.

"Our main idea was to get some silly shapes and odd designs but give them a realistic finish. We saw 5000 FINGERS OF DR. T—it was a wonderful picture, but we wanted ours to feel more realistic, so we went for metallic finishes with interesting patinas. We're not going for a comic book look like Mel Brooks in SPACEBALLS, where it's cheesy. In our minds, even though it's a funny planet, we wanted the audience to feel like they were in a real place. I never understood who made

the rule that comedy had to be brightly lit colors, but we're certainly breaking it."

The concern of the producers and the director for the visual look of the film extended to the mechanical effects as well. Tony Gardner's makeup crew provides three radio-controlled heads for each of the fish women attendants and dog men guards in Spengo's court; Griff, the Space Rat, a fully articulated mechanical figure who mimics everything he hears; and a swarm of weird mushroom characters who pursue Jones through the sewers of Spengo. Gardner also came up with a bald makeup for Lovitz, whose Emperor applies different wigs, beards and moustaches in order to adopt a different look every day.

"Greg's really brought this to life," said Solomon of Beeman. "If the movie succeeds, it's because of him and the cast. We gave them a really difficult script, and I have to say we ended up with something better than I expected. I haven't always felt that way, with all due respect to the people who made the first BILL AND TED movie. In this case, I feel the movie is probably better than the script. There was plenty of room for improvement." □

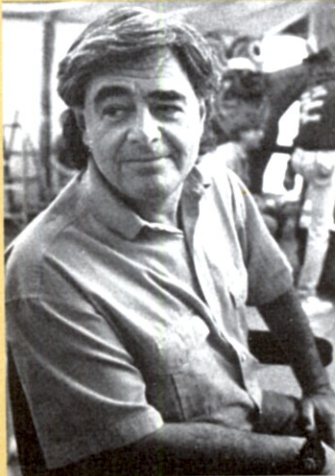
# RADIO FLYER

**Fantasy makeups got scaled down to trim the high-flying budget.**

*By Sheldon Teitelbaum*

When called in last June by director Richard Donner to create the makeup and mechanical effects for Columbia Picture's aborted and then revived production of RADIO FLYER, Kevin (CHILD'S PLAY, TALES FROM THE CRYPT) Yagher faced a full plate. The \$30 million film—this not including the \$10 million in preproduction costs written off when Columbia, at the behest of producer Michael Douglas, yanked the directorial reins from first-time director and film screenwriter David Mickey Evans—was to have involved at least twelve extravagantly conceived and costly-to-produce creatures, including a five-armed worm man.

Director Richard Donner, who took over after writer and first-time director David Mickey Evans was fired.



The quest to recoup lost monies, however, led to severe cutbacks in the film's effects. In the end, Yagher, a friend of Donner's since their work together two years ago on HBO's TALES FROM THE CRYPT, supplied the head and part of the shell of a mechanical tortoise, a prosthetic arm that bleeds when bitten by a dog, and a few walking corpses Yagher described as "yahoo." The film's much-touted mechanical buffalo, a fiend for Oreo cookies and a heavy shmoozer, was created by Rick Lazarini (ALIENS). Columbia plans to open the film, which stars John Heard, Lorraine Bracco, and Adam Baldwin next fall, after postponing its announced July 12th summer release.

"A lot of this stuff," said Yagher of the creature effects in the film, "appears only subliminally. For instance, one of the kids in the film (Elijah Wood, eight, and Joseph Mazzello, seven) sees sheets billowing in the wind and imagines them becoming zombies. But only for four frames or so. The same thing happens with the tortoise. The kids have a pet tortoise in their clubhouse, and for a few seconds, it becomes a giant, snarling tortoise that snaps at them. It was decided that since these cuts would be almost too quick to see, we oughtn't spend a lot of money on them."

Indeed, according to Yagher,



Elijah Wood (l) and Joseph Mazzello, brothers abused by their stepdad who retreat into a world of fantasy, Columbia's big-budget summer drama, now postponed.

the production settled for a "Disney-like mishmash" of creatures and props. One creature was achieved with an old Yeti suit in stock.

Whether the rest of the film comes to resemble a Disney-like mishmash is highly doubtful. Donner, as those who have seen LETHAL WEAPON or his episodes for TALES FROM THE CRYPT know, does not do Disney. There was a time, in fact, after completing THE GOONIES, when it would have seemed unlikely he'd ever do a kid's movie again. But Donner's encounter with the Evans script—about two little boys at the tail-end of Sixties suburbia who have been badly abused by their step-father, and who escape their painful reality through flights of the imagination taken aboard their engine-red Radio Flyer wagon—overcame any such reticence.

Donner had, in fact, been pitched RADIO FLYER before Columbia. He read it in November 1989, and claimed to have been overwhelmed by it. But Donner lost his bid to direct because Columbia, equally enamored by the script, offered Evans the chance to direct.

Two weeks into production, however, in June, newly appointed Columbia bosses Jon Peters and Peter Guber pulled the plug on the production, and ousted Evans as director. There were charges that this

had, in fact, been Columbia's game plan all along—that Evans' ouster was marked from the start, so that Columbia would be left with the script. Getting rid of Evans, allegedly because he did not work well with children and because his dailies weren't going over in the front office, cost the production \$10 million and a cast that had included Rosanna Arquette in a pay-or-play contract. Sony-appointed golden boys Peters and Guber found their debut badly tarnished as a result.

Their bad luck, however, was Donner's good fortune. Columbia offered him \$5 million to take over the film, or rather, to scrap the old film and start anew, with his own production crew and a cast of his choosing. His wife, Lauren-Schuler Donner, received \$1 million to produce. And Evans, who had received \$1.2 million for his script, was mollified with a producer's credit, points in the profits, and a two-year deal with the studio.

Evans was also drafted to rewrite his script—Donner toned down the child abuse angle, and some of its more painful moments. Yagher reported that Donner had a gas doing the film. "I think Dick grabbed the film because of the children," he said. "He's got this great booming voice that can scare the crap out of you. But he was just great with the kids." □

# TERMINATOR 2

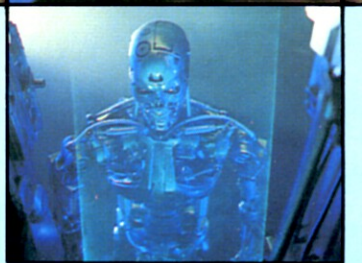
**Just call him "dad" in the megabuck sequel aimed squarely at family audiences.**

*By Frederick S. Clarke*

Behind schedule, seriously over budget, **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGEMENT DAY** wrapped principal photography at the end of April, careening towards the much ballyhooed July 3rd release date announced by distributor Tri-Star Pictures, a date some of those working on the production doubted the film would meet. Director James Cameron's megabuck sequel to his 1984 low-budget hit has become the talk of Hollywood, with production and marketing costs rumored to be as high as \$110 million for Tri-Star and producer Carolco Pictures.

Arnold Schwarzenegger returns in **TERMINATOR 2** in action that plays out much like a remake—Cameron's switch this time is that Arnold's cyborg is a good guy, programmed not to kill. Linda Hamilton is back as the mother of the savior of mankind in its war with machines, a 12-year-old boy, played by newcomer Edward Furlong. Schwarzenegger saves them from the clutches of Key 1000, played by a diminutive Robert Patrick, another Terminator from the future, armed with the power to change its shape. In the process, Schwarzenegger's cyborg develops a father/son relationship with the boy.

So why is the film so expensive? One reason is that Cameron likes to think "big." The film's climactic night car chase tries to outdo—in scope and duration, if not excitement—the breathtaking stunts and action of George Miller's **THE ROAD WARRIOR**. Stretching over the movie's last third, the chase is a reprise of the original's automobile demolition derby filmed on a grand scale by helicopters along a 5½ mile stretch of California's Long Beach Freeway. It took an army of electricians three and a half weeks



Schwarzenegger as Cyberdyne Systems Terminator Model 101 from the 1984 low-budget hit. Inset: Arnold in the sequel's advertising, shown being assembled at the plant, playing on the character's bad guy image, setting up the film's surprise twist.

just to rig the roadway with Musko lights—stadium lights on cranes—to film an aerial master shot, coordinated using 127 walkie-talkies to communicate with crews along the route. "Cameron runs things like a military operation," said one crew member. "I was hoarse after three days, speaking over such long distances."

Following Cameron's "bigger is better" vision of the sequel, **TERMINATOR 2** starts in the future on a pitched battle between mankind and the machines, like the opening of the original, only this time with several hovering robot gunships—not just one. Live action for the sequence was filmed at an abandoned steel mill in Oxnard, California, due for demolition, which was blown up and set ablaze for the warfare action, with models and miniatures used to make it look properly futuristic. Said one crew member working on the effects, "It's like the **BEN-HUR** of science fiction."

Also reportedly repeated from the original film is another sequence of the Terminator stripped of Schwarzenegger's fleshy covering, fighting on as an impervious, unstoppable robotic skeleton, a combination of stop-motion effects by Fantasy 2 and live-action robotics by Stan Winston. Even the eye-opening computer-generated effects by ILM, used to create Schwarzenegger's more powerful Terminator opponent, Key 1000, are said by one observer to have the ring of familiarity, looking suspiciously like the computer graphics imagery of ILM's water tentacle for Cameron's **THE ABYSS**. The shape-changing concept of the film's villain, rendered in high-tech visuals, results in the science fiction cliché of having the new Terminator assume the identity of other characters. The plot has Schwarzenegger

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# CHILD'S PLAY

## An on-the-set report, pulling Chucky's puppet

By Todd French

With CHILD'S PLAY 3, the second sequel to the successful '88 horror thriller, everyone's favorite non-Cabbage Patch Kid returns to continue his maniacal pursuit of youthful antagonist Andy Barclay. This time around, however, there are some major crimps in the mini-Terminator's quest: set eight years into the future, the film has Chucky going up against a now teenaged Andy; the film's back-drop, a military academy, the latest stop for the orphaned boy, gives the kid the hardware to go on the offensive against his diminutive tormentor.

The Universal release, set to open in August, was filmed over a ten-week period on locations in Missouri and L.A., and marks the feature debut of TV director Jack Bender (THE MIDNIGHT HOUR). Repeating their respective producing and scripting chores are series stalwarts David Kirschner (who also designed Chucky) and Don Mancini. Effects artist Kevin Yagher once again handles the puppet animatronics.

"The humor and the horror is a very fine line that I'm trying to walk," said Bender of his approach to the sequel. "I'm really trying to go back to the first film which was genuinely suspenseful but a little darker edged. But don't worry, we're still trying to get the laughs—Chucky is still very funny and there are some classic Don Mancini/Chucky lines."

Commenting on the shift in CHILD'S PLAY 3's time and locale, Mancini, who originally conceived the series as a refutation of blatant kid-oriented advertising, acknowledged that he felt that "audiences have gotten their fill of chasing this kid around." Mancini also felt that the film's Kent Military Academy setting (actually shot on location at Kemper Military School in Boonville, Missouri) would be a fresh departure from the urban and suburban settings of the previous films.

"I thought it would be interesting to put Andy on the offensive in contrast to the last two movies," said Mancini. "In CHILD'S PLAY 3, Andy's sixteen years old and on the cusp of manhood, which was why I set it in a military academy—the environment underlines this theme of



Justin Whalin as the now-teenaged Andy Barclay, shipped off to military school for more stalk-and-slash with his ol' pal Chucky in CHILD'S PLAY 3, opening nationally August 16.

Andy becoming a man. It's a bastion of male bullshit. You can also just imagine the weapons Andy has at his disposal and the hissable authority figures available. The setting really works well. It's a fun arena for an anarchist like Chucky to be in." Added Mancini about the setting's novelty, "I've never seen a horror film that took place in a military academy except DAMIEN: OMEN II, where the setting was a mere back-drop."

CHILD'S PLAY 2, released by Universal last November, ended with Chucky convincingly trashed after a climactic duel with Andy in The Good Guy toy factory. Eight years later, unscrupulous toy mogul Sullivan (Peter Haskell, who, along with Chucky's voice Brad Dourif, is the only adult to reprise his role from the earlier films) decides to re-market The Good Guy line, giving the ever-vengeful spirit of deceased serial-killer Charles Lee Ray the chance to take possession of another doll

and pick up Barclay's trail. In the film's opening set-piece, despicable toy-maker Sullivan gets his just desserts at Chucky's hands in a nerve-jangling "three-page sequence with 120 cuts," according to Bender. One of the film's dark-humored horror bits features Andy Robinson (HELLRAISER, COBRA) as a sadistic academy barber who gets his own scalp-job courtesy of Chucky. "Robinson plays The Barber From Hell," said Bender.

Teen actor Justin Whalin (THE DEAD POOL, GENERAL HOSPITAL) plays Andy, now in military school, after having been shunted off to a series of foster homes over the years. Perhaps realizing that a teenaged Andy will be tough to deal with, Chucky opts to trade souls with a younger cadet, Tyler (Jeremy Sylvers). Realizing he's the only one who can save the boy, Andy once again squares off with his pint-sized nemesis, their final showdown set against a hair-raising amusement park ride called The Devil's Lair.

If having Chucky to contend with isn't bad enough, Andy is targeted by the usual authority stereotypes, including a bullying cadet named Shelton (YOUNG RIDERS co-star Travis Fine in the antithesis of his nice guy TV persona). Mancini was quick to stress, however, that Chucky is not going to restrict his mayhem to an assortment of parade-ground tyrants. "I think it's very important to be willing to let sympathetic characters be removed," said Mancini. "I've had people say, 'why did you kill off so-and-so?' It's important to keep in mind that Chucky is capable of killing off someone we like, because then we know there's something at stake if our heroes are really in jeopardy."

In CHILD'S PLAY 3 Andy gets a couple of new allies in De Silva (feature newcomer Perrey Reeves), a savvy and capable coed cadet who also becomes Andy's love interest; and his roommate, nerdy intellectual and school sadsack Harold Aubrey Whitehurst (Dean Jacobsen, who played a younger version of Daniel Stern's character in COUP DE VILLE).

In spite of the film's violence, and the basic genre staples we've come to expect from the series, Bender said he was serious about conveying just how emotionally dis-



# 3

## horror strings.

enfranchised from Kent's drill and discipline atmosphere the kids really are. "Something that I really wanted to get across is that all of these kids are wounded in some way or another," said Bender. "There's this one scene where Andy and De Silva, the girl he befriends, are looking out from this bluff during war-games, and they see, off in the distance, the twinkling lights of this amusement park. It's really innocence out there. These kids are running around doing war-games while other kids are going to movies and leading normal lives. I think it's interesting to take this character [Andy] at age sixteen, who's obviously been through hell and built up a lot of emotional armor, and see how he reacts when this nightmare comes alive again."

The nightmare features some technical innovations this time. In addition to Yagher's complement of stunt, rod puppet, servo-motor-driven and cable-operated Chuckies, the doll has been equipped with improved lip-syncing capabilities. "Chucky's now computerized," said Mancini. "Chucky actually enunciates—it's not the flapping mouth on a muppet, it's quite sophisticated. In the first two films it was always hit-or-miss. Now, one of the puppeteers wears this contraption around his head, like a catcher's mask, which is wired to Chucky so that when the puppeteer moves his jaw, Chucky moves his. You also have these

continued on page 62

Kevin Yagher's animatronic Chucky gives "Barber from Hell" Andy Robinson (inset) a trim job after giving him too close a shave from the barber's chair.



# BILL & TED GO TO HELL

The excellent duo are back in a big-budget summer sequel.

By Steve Biodrowski

Across the freeway from Magic Mountain Amusement park in Valencia, California, an hour north of Hollywood, is a large tract of fairly new, ordinary-looking warehouses that comprise the Santa Clarita Studios Production Center. Sprawling across all six of the studio's stages and most of its parking lot last January was the production of **BILL AND TED GO TO HELL**, the sequel to **BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE**, which reunites Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves in a script by Chris Matheson and Ed Solomon, the writing team responsible for the 1989 Orion sleeper hit. Also returning is George Carlin as Rufus, their mentor from the future. The sequel is directed by Peter



Breaking rocks in Hell, supervised by the "dark figure."

Hewitt, a 28-year-old British filmmaker in his feature film debut.

With a budget of \$20 million, and a ten-week shooting schedule which began January 7, **BILL AND TED GO TO HELL** was a production racing to be ready for opening July 19, a potentially lucrative summer release date selected by Orion. Looming in the crush of production was a pos-

sible title change to **BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE II** (to avoid problems with television advertising) and the rumored sale of the film to another distributor because cash-strapped Orion had insufficient funds for prints and advertising needed to mount its wide summer blitz.

New faces in the cast include former blaxploitation star Pam Grier as a rock promoter who books Bill and Ted's group for a Battle of the Bands contest; Joss Ackland (**LETHAL WEAPON II**) as the villainous Denomolous, who sends robot duplicates from the future to kill and replace Bill and Ted; William Saddler (the *noirish* executioner of Walter Hill's episode of **TALES FROM THE CRYPT**), as the Grim Reaper; and Faith No More guitarist Jim Martin, as

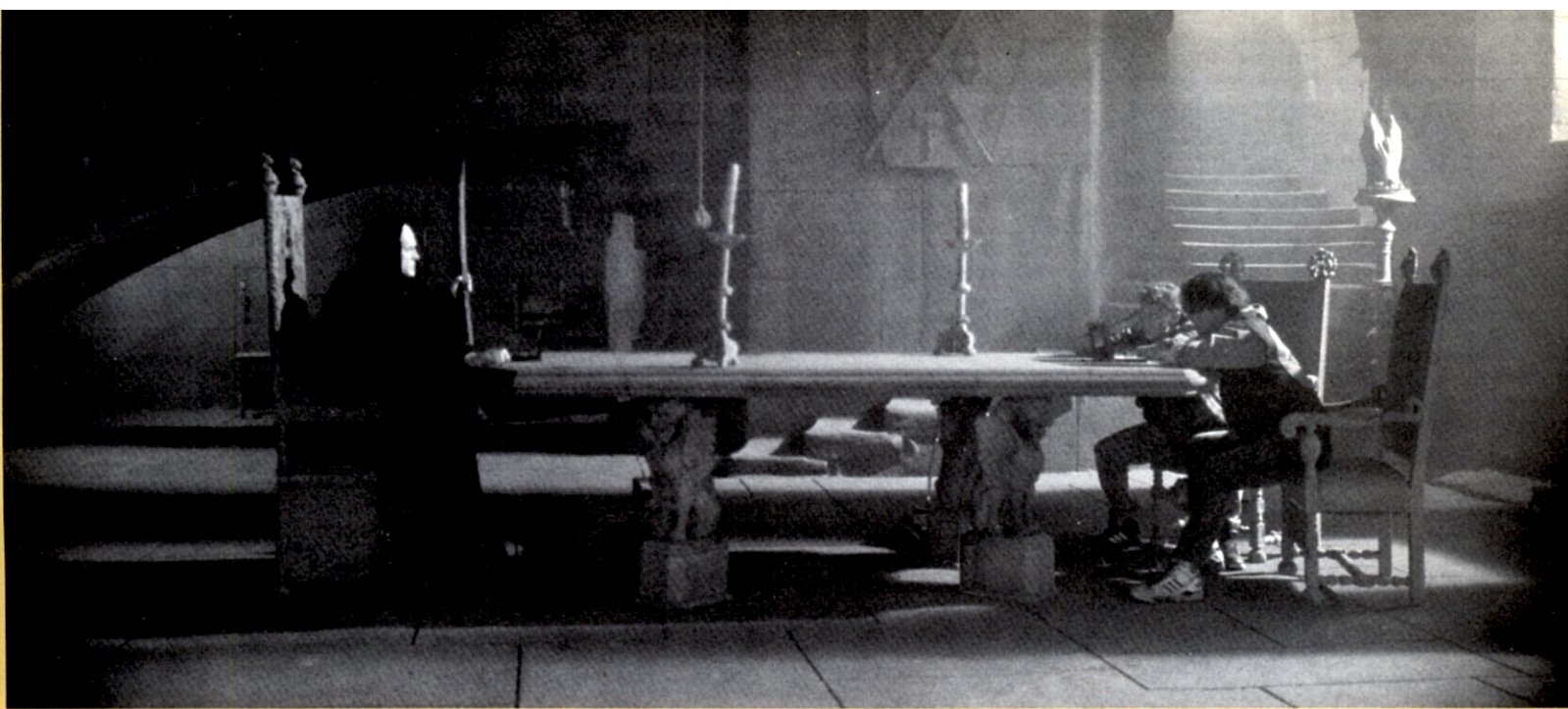
himself.

On the set, Winters and Reeves were seen filming one of the weirder makeup gags required by the script: as a sick joke, the evil robot duplicates unzip the artificial skin from their foreheads; rather than revealing a robotic interior, the edited scene will surprise audiences by showing the evil Ted robot has disguised himself as Bill and vice versa. With a two-camera set up, Hewitt filmed each actor in separate close-ups, performing simultaneously. Viewed live, the skin-peeling effect, devised by Kevin Yagher, who worked on the original, is gruesome in a bizarre kind of way. "It could look a little gross," admitted Yagher. "But it all happens so fast I don't think it will—we'll see when it's cut together."

For a film with such an

**Bill & Ted get an audience with the Devil himself (left), pulled on a meteor into the flaming maw of his gargoyles throne (below), production paintings by Peter Lloyd. Production designer David Snyder (right) with the meteor on set.**





Left: Filming Bill (Alex Winter) and Ted (Keanu Reeves) as they defeat the Grim Reaper (Bill Sadler), challenging him to a game of Battleship. Above: Grounding the comedy in cinematic reality, production design by David Snyder. Right: Sadler gets instructions from British director Pete Hewitt (l), making his feature debut.

ambitious schedule, the atmosphere on set was surprisingly relaxed. While Hewitt directed the crew, setting up the next shot, producer Scott Kroopf explained the sequel's genesis. Working for Interscope Communications, Kroopf had produced the original for Dino DeLaurentiis' D.E.G. Company, which went bankrupt and sold it to Orion. "All the arrangements for a sequel had been made with D.E.G. on the first film, and they had all lapsed," said Kroopf. "It was not the easiest deal to put together, for any number of reasons. The most significant was our insistence that we have the same writers, that we have Alex and Keanu, and that Nelson Entertainment and Orion, our financing partners, agree to let us open up the movie—to make a movie not just for kids but a movie that works for everyone. That meant that the

storyline was going to be a bit more sophisticated, and the scope was going to be bigger. The first was a non-union, low-budget film; this one is a union film with a really good budget.

"Nelson and Orion supported us," said Kroopf. "We got Chris Matheson and Ed Solomon to write the screenplay, which I thought was the key to putting the whole thing together. With them and a really good story idea, we then got Alex and Keanu. Their careers have moved on, and they've grown up, so they were concerned they not be locked into playing these two teenage characters. We said, 'Bill and Ted can grow five years older, because the comic spark between them is not a particularly youth-oriented thing. They're classic clowns, like Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy, and they should go on having adventures until they're senior citizens.'"

According to Kroopf, Stephen Herek, who directed the original, was approached with the sequel but was unavailable. The producers chose to go for a first-time director as opposed to a more seasoned, safer choice, because, said Kroopf, "We wanted to find someone for whom this was going to be the most important film they've ever done. I went through fifty directors, look-



ing at everyone's reels." Kroopf was impressed by THE CANDY SHOW, Hewitt's short film which won the British equivalent of the Academy Award. "It reminded me slightly of a Terry Gilliam film," said Kroopf. "It looked like he had not compromised a single thing in it. He'd done it on a feature-film scale, and the budget was only £18,000, which is between \$30-\$40 thousand."

Between set-ups, Hewitt said he was given the BILL AND TED GO TO HELL script to read after he'd made a deal with Interscope and Nelson to turn THE CANDY SHOW, into a feature film. Hewitt had never seen BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE. "It was weird to read because they talk in a particular way, which is more recognizable to Americans," said the British director. "There was dialogue set in a university

700 years from now where students are talking about the language of Bill and Ted 'Excellent means really good, right?'—and I thought, 'This makes no sense!'"

Despite the language barrier, Hewitt said he managed to connect with the chemistry of Bill and Ted. "It's interesting that an English person is directing this. The fact that it's about two valley guys is not what's important. I don't think that's why it was so popular; it was because it was two guys who got on so well with each other. Everybody at some point has had a friend they're so in tune with they almost don't even need to speak. Bill and Ted are the ultimate version of that—one person in two bodies."

Helping to visualize the Bill and Ted concept on a grander scale is production designer David L. Snyder and visual effects supervisor Richard



## DIRECTING BILL & TED

**“I hope to link it all together visually,” said director Pete Hewitt. “It has to look like one film, not only in the way that it’s lit or how the camera moves, but in every thing that’s built.”**

Yuricich (both Oscar nominated for *BLADERUNNER*). Amazingly, despite the bigger scope and budget, the sequel’s schedule is only three days longer than the original’s. “We’re on a sprint,” said Kroopf. “Because of the actors’ availability, we couldn’t start until January 7th. While we’re shooting first unit, Richard Yuricich is directing the second unit/effects unit. We’ve got a two ring circus going at all times here—actually, a three-ring circus if you count all the guys at Video Image who are churning out the opticals.”

Kroopf would have preferred holding off on the effects work until post-production, but that wouldn’t have allowed time to test the film with audiences. “Because this is a comedy we didn’t want to fall into the same trap as a lot of movies that race to a release date,

The Stations, a Martian duo recruited for help by Bill & Ted in Heaven, suit design by makeup expert Kevin Yagher.

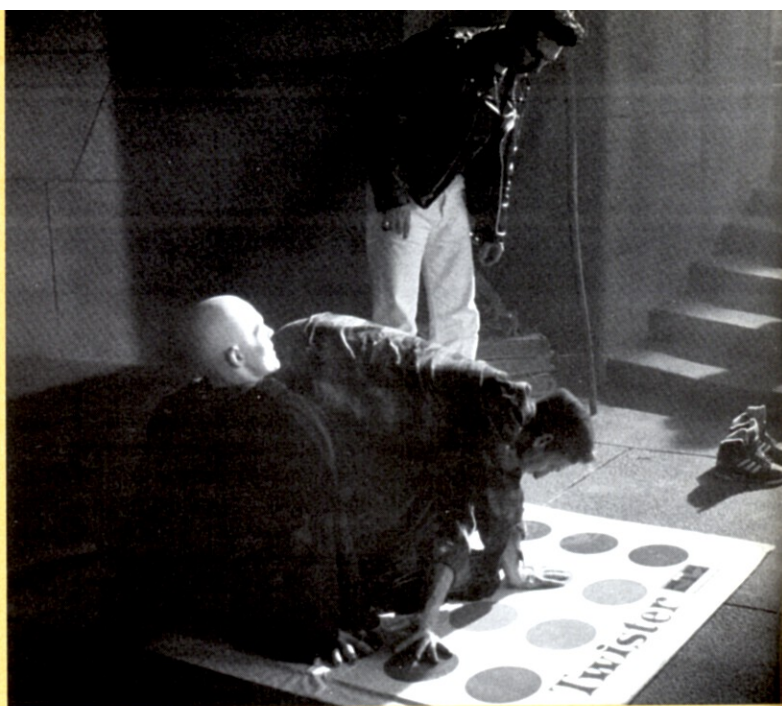


which is not getting an opportunity to preview the movie,” said Kroopf. “We had many lessons from the first movie about why previewing is important. One thing that we know is that when we preview there’s got to be enough to look at so the audience can follow the story and get at least a flavor of what the final product will look like. So we’re shooting effects elements simultaneously with the live action—we’ll see the initial test runs halfway through the shoot. That’s the other reason for hiring a young, eager director: we needed someone inexhaustible, to keep up with this pace.”

**W**riters Chris Matheson and Ed Solomon arrived on the set separately to observe the filming as welcome visitors. The action of the evil Bill and Ted robots unzipping their foreheads is one of their favorite gags—representing the kind of bizarre humor which they said was toned down in the first film. The success of the original gave Matheson and Solomon a little more leeway on the sequel, but it remained an uphill battle to write the screenplay their way. In particular, Orion failed to see the wisdom of killing off the main characters and sending them to Hell. Orion asked them to develop an alternate idea in which Bill and Ted enter famous works of literature in order to pass their English exam.

“The literature idea sounds different from time travel,” said Solomon, “but it ends up being the same thing: Bill and Ted go into historical settings and meet famous characters, except now the characters are fictional.”

After a frustrating attempt to develop Orion’s idea, Matheson and Solomon were con-



Director Pete Hewitt rehearses the action as Bill & Ted match wits with Death.

vinced there was no mileage in it, so they decided to form an alliance with Winter and Reeves. “We knew Alex and Keanu didn’t want to do the same thing over again, so we pitched our idea to them,” recalled Matheson. “They really liked it and told Orion that’s the one they wanted to do.”

Said Solomon, “To be honest, Orion didn’t really care whether they had us or not. But they wanted Alex and Keanu; if they hadn’t, we probably wouldn’t be here now. We got to do things our way, so if it doesn’t work it’s our fault.”

Matheson and Solomon’s script is set five years after the events of the first film. Bill and Ted have graduated high school and moved into an apartment together, but their music ability has not improved dramatically. Robot duplicates kill them and take their place, in order to sabotage their appearance at a Battle of the Bands contest—presumably the event that launches them on their way to the legendary status they enjoy in the future.

The script’s most noticeable departure from its predecessor is its broader scope. A walk around some of the sound stages at Santa Clarita, filled with \$1 million worth of sets in various stages of completion, was evidence of how lavishly the script is being translated to the screen. A huge wooden frame formed the skeleton for

what will eventually be the head of a giant gargoye statue. Across the stage is what appeared to be a meteor. In the film, the full-scale prop, with Bill and Ted perched atop, will be drawn by a chain toward the flaming mouth of the gargoye. The rest of the stage is networked with a maze of low corridors through which Bill and Ted try to find a way out of Hell; in the film, behind each door will lurk a private hell, based upon some guilty incident in the character’s past.

Outside, a large area of the studio’s parking lot is covered with white Mylar, providing the background for a high-angle live-action plate to be composited later with a matte painting of Heaven.

Effects supervisor Richard Yuricich, perched atop one of the studio buildings, trained his camera down on doubles for Winter and Reeves’, standing on a rusty-red, metallic platform. The shot provides an over-the-shoulder view from behind a towering demonic figure as he peers down at Bill and Ted. The problem for Yuricich, besides time and geometry, is getting a steady image which will register seamlessly with the optical elements to be added later.

“Every time we’re about to shoot, we have to tell the guys in the editing department not to walk down the corridors, because we get vibrations on the roof,” said Yuricich. “You



Alex Winter as Bill (r) gives Keanu Reeves as Ted the high five for beating the Grim Reaper (Bill Sadler) at a game of Twister in the Reaper's gothically appointed castle.

know the old story about Disney studios? The bank wouldn't loan Walt Disney the money to build it unless the buildings were designed so they could be used for something else, in case the studio failed and the bank had to foreclose; so if you're ever walking through, you'll notice that all the corridors are laid out like a hospital. It's the same thing here: these buildings are not really studios; they're warehouses."

The bigger scale of **BILL AND TED GO TO HELL** results in part from the need to depict Matheson and Solomon's fanciful settings, which include Heaven as well as Hell, a lure for Hewitt on the project. "A lot of my favorite films involve Heaven and Hell, ghosts and angels," said the director, citing Frank Capra's **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE** and Michael Powell's **STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN**. "When

Bill and Ted meet God, the staircase is straight out of that film," said Hewitt. "We're going to include statues of [director] Michael Powell and [its star] David Niven."

Hewitt spent six months of pre-production planning how to portray Heaven and Hell in a way that would be instantly recognizable but not completely stereotypical. "We started off with lots of drawings," he said. "We had two or three conceptual artists and I did a load of drawings myself. The initial conceptual drawings became key storyboards; then we had four or five storyboard guys come in, and it was a matter of doing the in-betweening, thinking about how to get Bill and Ted from this drawing to that drawing.

"It's a big film, but it's *not* that big a budget, so it had to be planned well," said Hewitt. "We storyboarded pretty

much the whole film; I can't think of any other way of doing it. I was anxious that the storyboards not be a bible. We're going by them a lot, but if we stuck with them so religiously that the actors only had to step in line with each drawing, the whole thing would be stiff.

"One major concern was that the scale of the whole thing not eclipse Bill and Ted, which would defeat the whole purpose of the film," said the director. "I kept my eye on that very carefully. For that reason, the film is not 'jokey' or 'gaggy'—it's going to be incredibly funny, but it's very straightforward. All the sets are serious—the humor comes from Bill and Ted goofing off in a 'real' Heaven and a 'real' Hell. There's far more mileage in that approach. Doing it that way, you can be much bigger and not eclipse the two guys, because you've got this huge raging vista that is Hell and into it come these two bright, colorful dots that are Bill and Ted. Whereas if you have a bright, colorful Bill-and-Ted-type Hell, you'd never notice them.

"The whole film is incredibly extreme. With so many different settings, another concern was that it would look like seven or eight different films, a mess, cutting from one weird set to another, that it wouldn't hold together. To combat that, there's this very rigid stylistic

theme running through the designs. We're basing everything architecturally on domes, spheres, and circles. I don't know whether it's going to 'read' on screen, but it makes me feel better knowing it's there. Hell is a spherical planet with smaller round objects going around it. Heaven is a large disc, with the skies full of discs on which cities are propped. The future is all domes. Heaven is one color—white with a shade of lilac blue—and Hell is deep red, so Bill and Ted will *ping* right off the screen. By using these techniques, I hope to link it all together visually. It has to look like one film from the ground up—not only in the way it's lit, not only in the way the camera moves, but in every single thing that's built."

Alex Winter in Yagher's prosthetic design as Bill's 88-year-old grandma, Granny Preston, Bill's nightmare.



Yagher adjusts the Ted disguise worn by Alex Winter as Bill's evil robot duplicate.



DIRECTING BILL & TED

**“This is my first film,” said Pete Hewitt. “I had no idea of some of the things that could go wrong, so I just plowed on, oblivious. No one told me I couldn’t do it, so we’ve done it.”**



Pete Hewitt directs Brendan Ryan as young Ted on a skewed house set, awaiting an encounter with a nightmare vision of the Easter Bunny, one of Hell’s bad trips.

Interviewed midway through the film’s ten-week shoot, the film’s tight schedule did not appear to be wearing Hewitt down. In fact, the director maintained that he regarded some of the schedule’s necessities, such as editing the film while it’s still in production, as luxuries. “That’s something which, because I’ve never done it before, doesn’t really bother me,” said Hewitt. “Everybody was saying, ‘You can’t shoot a film and cut it at the same time.’ We’re cutting as we go along; we shoot five days a week and edit on Saturday. That seems sensible to me: you shoot something; it’s fresh in your mind; you go in, check it out, and put it all together; and if you find you need something, the set is still there.

“This is my first film, so I’ve been lucky. I had no idea of

some of the things that could go wrong, so I just plowed on, oblivious. No one told me I couldn’t do this, so we’ve done it.”

**A**lso taking the production crunch in stride is makeup supervisor Kevin Yagher, whose shop was simultaneously overseeing the effects for two other productions—*RADIO FLYER* and *CHILD’S PLAY 3*. Said Yagher, “On the first one they called me and said, ‘What can you put together in a week?’ This time I had about four months to create all kinds of characters. I’m still making new things—every time I turn around they’re asking me for something else.”

Yagher’s shop is providing the film with a devil, a toy

Easter bunny that transforms into a giant, evil monster, and prosthetic makeup for Alex Winter to play Bill’s own grandmother—one of his nightmares. “Alex has been a prince about wearing the makeup,” said Yagher.

Yagher is also supplying the effects for a sequence where the robots take off their heads and play basketball. And then there’s Colonel Oates, one of Ted’s nightmares from Hell—Yagher takes the drill sergeant, played by Chelcie Ross, and exaggerates his features into a visage of cartoon evil. Yagher is also supplying background aliens for a sequence he likened to “the cantina sequence in *STAR WARS*—we’re going to slop together whatever we can find.”

One of Yagher’s more prominent contributions to the sequel is “Station,” a Martian ally Bill and Ted find in Heaven and bring to Earth to help defeat their robot duplicates. Named after the only word the character speaks (although the meaning, apparently is always different), Station is actually two identical small characters, a sort of Tweedle-Dee-Tweedle-Dum, who fuse together. “They’re full-body, foam rubber suits with little actors inside,” said Yagher. “When they fuse we have a tall actor

inside a suit with a sleeker-looking design.”

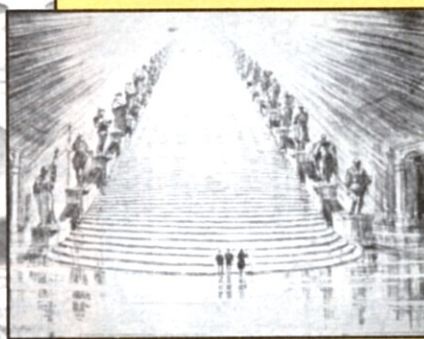
Yagher summed up his work on the film this way, “The stuff is done in a funny way, like in *BEETLEJUICE*. Peter’s approach to the characters is sort of cartoony, which is fun for me because I usually end up making a guy burned from head to toe or a devil doll like Chucky. They’re real quick gags; we’re not going to stop the movie for a major effects scene. It’s a fun picture.”

The sequel’s rushed schedule is indicative of the extent to which the filmmakers believe a following for Bill and Ted has grown since the first film. Said producer Scott Kroopf, “The original came out on President’s Day, which was terrific for us. I don’t know if we could have competed in summer. There is no question this time, given the level of interest, that Bill and Ted have worked their way into the mass consciousness, so Orion is determined to get it out in summer. Starting in January, they knew June was totally impossible. They would have liked us to go out July 4th, because it’s a four-day weekend, but we picked the 19th as the earliest viable date. We have a shot at that. It all depends on the crucial point when we preview the movie. If we have to make a big adjustment, we could punt back a couple of weeks into August.”

Like everyone else involved with the project, Alex Winter believes that Bill and Ted will expand their appeal beyond the original’s core audience of young fans. “I think we’re doing what Sam Raimi did with *EVIL DEAD II*, where the sequel improved on the original; the first film was small but successful, so on the second film we have the budget to make the film we wanted to make the first time.” □



Heaven in a preproduction sketch by Peter Lloyd. Inset: Mentor Huebner’s design for Hewitt’s idea for a homage to Britain’s *STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN*.



# BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

**Writers Chris Matheson  
and Ed Solomon on the  
birth of the phenomenon.**

*By Steve  
Biodrowski*

It all started inconspicuously enough, with a simple little improv sketch. In 1983, Ed Solomon and Chris Matheson were students at U.C.-L.A., where Matheson directed Solomon's one-act play, *The Last Angel*. Solomon had been on the writing staff of the situation comedy, *LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY*; Matheson, of course, is the son of noted fantasy author Richard Matheson. With a few fellow students, Matheson and Solomon formed an improvisation workshop in which they came up with the idea for Bill and Ted, playing the characters themselves. "One day, we decided to do a couple of guys who knew nothing about history, talking about history," said Solomon. "The initial improv was them studying history, while Ted's father kept coming up to ask them to turn their music down."

After U.C.L.A., Matheson moved to a graduate school in San Diego to study theatre arts, while Solomon stayed in Los Angeles to become executive story editor on *IT'S GARRY SHANDLING'S SHOW*. They wrote letters to each other as Bill and Ted, and formulated the premise that would eventually lead them to write *BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE*,



Matheson's cameo in the sequel, at a seance to contact Bill & Ted.

during a long distance telephone call. "We considered Bill and Ted to be these innocents who would wander wide-eyed into any situation and treat everyone exactly the same—completely open, completely friendly," said Solomon. "They'd treat the guy sitting next to them in math class the same as Abraham Lincoln, with no sense of the context in which they lived." Aware of some of the criticism leveled at the first film, Solomon added, "It's by no means a glorification of idiocy—it's just ignoring the context."

Matheson and Solomon used the concept for *BILL AND TED'S TIME VAN*, a sketch for a comedy film along the lines of *KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE*, initially working with former improv group member Ryan Rowe. Later,



Alex Winter (l) and Keanu Reeves with Freud (Rod Loomis) in the 1989 original.

Matheson and Solomon expanded the sketch into a feature-length script at the suggestion of Matheson's father. Rufus, in the improv sketch, a 27-year-old waste case sophomore at San Dimas High School, was at first equipped with the van without explanation, later made an emissary from the future in rewrites. Matheson and Solomon originally wanted to make Bill and Ted responsible for historical disasters, but realized it was not a good idea for their heroes to be the catalyst for the loss of millions of innocent lives.

In polishing the script—written in seven days at Lake Tahoe—Matheson and Solomon refined Rufus by patterning him on former Van Halen rock musician David Lee Roth. "That was back when Roth was actually considered cool," said Solomon, "before he started looking like the old, Jewish man that he is." As a final, last minute joke, prior to

sending the script out for consideration, Matheson and Solomon added the idea that Bill and Ted go on to become idolized by future generations as a result of passing their history test. The decision would come back to haunt them during rewrites when executives, missing the joke, continued to ask for some sort of logical justification. Noted Solomon, "We had to fight at every turn the thinking 'Don't we need to see how they're going to become the greatest people who ever lived?' No! The point is: they have no idea why that's going to happen, and we have no idea why."

A producer friend of Matheson's father gave the script to Robert W. Cort, an independent producer at Interscope Communications, which took an option. When Warner Bros also expressed an interest, the writers embarked on a year of development, attempting to tailor the script to the studio's demands. "We did a series of rewrites, continuously making the script worse, in my opinion," said Solomon. "We didn't know any better—it was our first deal. They kept saying, 'This is a summer teen movie comedy which will only appeal to kids, so we have to emphasize that.'" Warner Bros eventually put the project into turnaround after deciding that the teen-comedy genre was dead.

Interscope had little trouble

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Solomon, camcording the filming of the sequel, on the set with Reeves as Ted.



# RO

## Disney's comic

By Daniel Schweiger

He's tough, sexy, and dressed in the rugged height of '30s fashion. But for all of his bravado, the Rocketeer is a little kid at heart, buck-hungry and self-centered before joining the fight for God, country, and dames. He's a character straight from the mold of Hollywood's by-gone movie serials where sneering villains would stop at nothing in the race for an object of incalculable power, with only the good guy hero impeding their fascist world order. Whether they were Nazis or fiends from outer space, evil would be spectacularly punched out before all science fiction hell broke loose. Then with the foes having met their just and terrible fates, the gritty protagonist would adjust his clothes, kiss the girl, and head towards the rising sun for more adventure.

Don't laugh, it's a formula that worked for such retro-serial hunks as Indiana Jones. Disney's Nazi-bashing Rocketeer might at first seem like just a Spielberg clone, with the novel gimmick of a booster pack serving as the holy relic that could change history. The difference audiences will discern this summer is that in *THE ROCKETEER*, 1938 is as much a palpable character as its roguish aviator.

Disney Pictures is sinking upwards of \$40 million into their vibrant time capsule, a gigantic production the studio hopes won't mirror the boxoffice disappointment and miscalculated nostalgia of their *DICK TRACY*. Though it's also based on a comic character, *THE ROCKETEER* is anchored solidly in our world. No primary colors or unwieldy stylization to avert the eye, just two-fisted action like they used to make for a fraction of the budget. The Touchstone Pictures production is scheduled for a June 21 release, with a marketing blitz that will rival *BATMAN*'s.

Duking it out for the rocket pack is newcomer Bill Campbell as Cliff Secord, a cocky pilot who has maturity thrust on him with the twin boosters. Timothy Dalton shows a dark side to his James Bond swagger as the nefarious movie star Neville Sinclair, with Jennifer Connelly (*LABYRINTH*) as Jenny, Cliff's girlfriend and the damsel in distress. Paul Sorvino (*DICK TRACY*) plays L.A.'s gangster boss Eddie Valentine, Alan



Newcomer Bill Campbell as Cliff Secord, alias The Rocketeer, atop a Nazi dirigible in the climax of Disney's summer adventure, opening June 21. Inset: Aerial acrobatics of the comic book's nostalgic '40s hero, created by Dave Stevens in 1982, clinging to the wing of a rescue plane.



# ROCKETEER

book hero echoes the thrills of Indiana Jones.



Campbell with Jennifer Connelly as Jenny, the Rocketeer's new girlfriend who replaces Betty Page, the comic strip's popular heroine who worked as a nude model. The film's Jenny is now an aspiring Hollywood actress.

Arkin (EDWARD SCISSORHANDS) is Cliff's trusted mechanic Peevy, and Terry O'Quinn (THE STEPFATHER) appears as man-of-action Howard Hughes. Directing this eclectic cast is former ILM art director Joe Johnston, who's been given even more incredible effects to play with after his mega-hit directing debut on Disney's HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS.

When a studio spends so much effort on a comic-based project, it's usually reserved for the likes of Superman, a hero with hundreds of issues and decades of merchandising experience. But "The Rocketeer," created by artist Dave Stevens in 1982, consists of just eight installments, a cult hero instead of a cultural phenomenon. Even though this flier's sales figures didn't come close to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, its pulpy artwork, slang-cracking ace, and solidly researched backdrop of Los Angeles in its aviation heyday won critical acclaim from the likes of Harlan Ellison and *Time* magazine. Stevens' "The Rocketeer" could easily have been an oversized comic from the Golden Age.

Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, comic fans-cum-filmmakers who had written a string of low-budget scripts for Empire Pictures, were given—literally—an option on "The Rocketeer's" screen rights in 1985. The partners' first step was to throw even more period flavor into Stevens' adventures, broadening them from the L.A. airfields to encompass the Hollywood culture. Secord would now take on gangsters in a nightclub, battle a snide movie star for his girlfriend's affections, and finally test his abilities against a Nazi Zeppelin. But despite the embellishments, Bilson and DeMeo kept "The Rocketeer's" basic plot and spirit intact, from Cliff's bizarre discovery of the rocket pack—thrown into his stout-nosed Geebee racing plane by thieves—to his teaming with Howard Hughes.

One major change involved giving Cliff's relationship with his girlfriend three dimensions. The Betty of the strip was changed to Jenny and made far less tart to avoid comparisons and/or legal complications with Bette Page, the '50s cheesecake

photography queen who was Stevens' inspiration. No doubt having the Rocketeer's girlfriend working as a nude model also conflicted with Disney's wholesome corporate image, once they bought the property.

"What Bette Page thinks of 'The Rocketeer' is anybody's guess, since she's guarded her privacy over the years," said DeMeo. "We've never tried to contact her, even though Dave is partly responsible for the cult that's been built around her. Instead of getting Bette into nude photography, we made her a film extra so the Hollywood crowd could get involved in the movie." Though the face of Betty in the strip clearly bears a resemblance to Page, the lovingly drawn body was that of film scream queen Brinke Stevens—then the artist's wife.

Bilson and DeMeo submitted their seven-page ROCKETEER outline to Disney in 1986, which marked the beginning of endless script changes and their repeated firing and rehiring on the project. Though the team and Stevens had thought of doing THE ROCKETEER as a smaller film, perhaps in black and white, the involvement of Disney and the Gordon Company inflated the premise to INDIANA JONES proportions, with studio tinkering as large as the intended budget. "From a production and economic standpoint, THE ROCKETEER was a major undertaking," DeMeo said. "You can imagine the commitment Disney was making to develop a series of movies around a character. They even called it their RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK. But the studio was only ready to green-light the picture after they had a satisfactory draft, with all the right story elements."

With Stevens' input, Bilson and DeMeo developed their scripts with director William Dear (HARRY AND THE HENDERSONS), who repositioned the story's major plot points, adding a duel with a Nazi spy plane and changing the Zeppelin into a submarine. But for all the explosive action and humanized comic characters, Disney fired and rehired Bilson and DeMeo three times in the five years it took to get THE ROCKETEER off the ground. "Any writer who's told his services will no longer be required goes through periods of anger, confusion, and worry," DeMeo

# ROCKETEER

## COMIC BOOK ORIGINS

*Comic book artist Dave Stevens on creating his ode to movie serial thrills and '40s nostalgia, making it work on screen.*

By Daniel Schweiger

The *Rocketeer* comic strip was created in 1982 by Dave Stevens, a 35-year-old commercial artist who'd based his hero on a childhood love for classic airplanes and such serials as *KING OF THE ROCKET MEN* (1949). "Everywhere I looked there would be planes from the World Wars, including P-38s, Flying Tigers, and Buzz Bombs," said Stevens of his inspirations. "All of the model kits I built were based on those aircraft, a hobby that made me realize I was growing up during aviation's most aesthetically interesting period. The engineers tried to build everything that could fly, and they came up with some incredible designs."

Visualizing his fantasies with pen and paper turned Stevens into a highly skilled

The comic book that inspired the film, created by Stevens in 1982 as a filler strip commissioned by Pacific Comics.



Stevens (l), an associate producer on the film, on the set with *Rocketeer* Bill Campbell.

artist. His comics experience was limited to assisting Russ Manning on *Tarzan* dailies and finishing other friends' jobs, and his first effort at creating his own strip was almost incidental. An editor at Pacific Comics phoned Stevens with the offer of six back-up pages, ones that could be filled with anything. Stevens used the pages to feature a flyboy hero that first occurred to him decades before.

"I took everything that I'd absorbed as a child and reinvented it as a movie serial on paper," said Stevens. "I wanted to do it chapter by chapter as if I was watching it onscreen, but have a completely different approach. That meant no Martians, weird robots, or war-time stuff. I wanted my 'Rocketeer' to be like *FIGHTING DEVIL DOGS* [Republic, 1938] and Reed Crandall's *Blackhawk*, more of an aviation comic than anything else. Though I had an affection for those serials in my youth, I

knew that kind of cornball stuff wouldn't have any allure for modern readers. 'Rocketeer' had to be as realistic as possible."

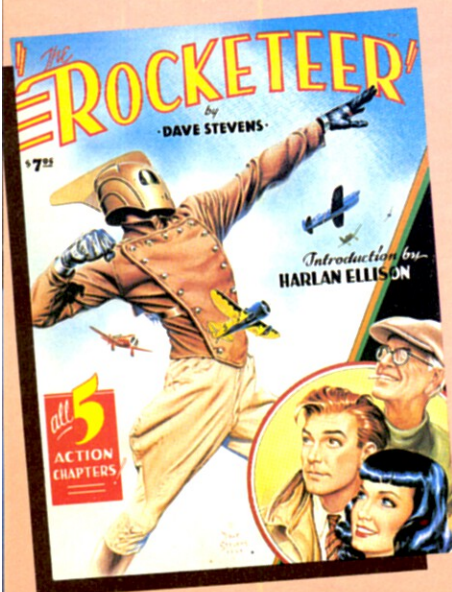
With Stevens' painstaking draughtsmanship causing *The Rocketeer's* first adventure to be published over two years, the comic had plenty of time to build its following, especially among genre filmmakers. The first director to option movie

rights to Stevens' strip was Steve Miner (*HOUSE*), but his efforts strayed too far from Stevens' concept. Filmmakers Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, two comic fans who dreamed of adapting *The Rocketeer*, came to Stevens' rescue in 1985. Responsible for a string of comic-inspired, low-budget scripts for Empire Pictures, Bilson and DeMeo had nostalgic passions that quickly struck a chord with Stevens.

"The reason I hit it off so well with Danny and Paul was because they were writing the type of material I enjoyed," said Stevens.

"Their ideas for *The Rocketeer* were heartfelt and affectionate tributes to the 1930's, with all the right dialogue and atmosphere. Most people would approach my characters contemporarily, but Danny and Paul saw them as pre-war mugs. They have a real love for stuff before they were born." Stevens' fondness for the team was strong enough to give them an option on *The Rocketeer* for free. □

The comic comes to life—Campbell jets into the sky above the Bulldog Cafe.



**“I’m sure Dave Stevens would admit the comic book Betty is cheesecake. She’s there to be photographed in the nude and be rescued.”**

said. “Why did this happen, and what don’t they like? How can we make it better? It was a frustrating time for us because we had a lot of effort invested in the project. Disney felt that they needed a different approach to the script, which meant bringing in someone else. But those scripts were thrown out, and we were always brought back on. That vindicated us, since we knew the executives liked our approach.”

Comics artist Dave Stevens had come up with the concept of his vintage airman after poring through old air magazines and period books on Los Angeles, laboring for weeks over a single installment to cram in nostalgic detail and aerial information. Though *The Rocketeer* debuted as a “throwaway” strip, it built word-of-mouth among fans hungry for something old and different. Here was the type of stuff that their grandparents had read, full of thrills, slang, and a juicy talent for playing with history.

Bilson and DeMeo worked collaboratively with Stevens to insure their film would be faithful to his vision. “We have a very close relationship with David, one that started out as people coming in for a business deal, and turning into good friends,” said DeMeo. “While Dave is the Rocketeer’s creator, we all knew that his characters had to move in different paths for the screen. The Rocketeer is a very traditional, straightforward guy who could have had his own comic in the ‘30s. Our story wasn’t revisionist at all, but instead a pulpy, straightahead action movie. There aren’t the dark, rich themes of BATMAN, or a hero who’s on the brink of suicide. Instead, THE ROCKETEER’s about a person

being turned into a hero, and trying to keep his humanity at the same time. He’s like the Flash, upon whom greatness is thrust.”

When Bilson and DeMeo were brought back by Disney for the first time, after being fired by Disney, they shifted the Rocketeer’s nightclub fight into the middle act, and put the zeppelin back at the story’s climax. But their major revision was in adding more tenderness in Cliff and Jenny’s relationship. “I’m sure that Dave will admit the comic book Betty is cheesecake,” said DeMeo. “She’s there to be photographed in the nude and rescued. Although she’s Cliff’s girlfriend, you never get a feeling of her being integrated into the plot. We had to make their



Bond actor Timothy Dalton as Neville Sinclair, a big Hollywood star with mob ties seeking to steal the rocket pack. Inset: Dalton’s comic book counterpart.

attraction more believable, which was a sticking point since the film’s inception. How do we bring Jenny into the story and revolve it around her, and not just create someone who’s kidnapped and has to be saved?”

As Bilson and DeMeo rethought the characters, the project’s delay caused Dear to take IF LOOKS COULD KILL at Warner Bros. Once Disney stopped flooding the

partners with script revisions, Dear lost his chance to direct to Joe Johnston, but retained a story credit. Johnston had reportedly once tried to option the property on his own.

“The studio has a deserved reputation for being tough on their scriptwriters,” said DeMeo. “David Hoberman, our executive in charge of production, said in an article that Disney asks for a lot of revisions. That’s their right as an employ-

## COMIC BOOK DIRECTOR

Having shaped the look of the STAR WARS and RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK series during his stint as an art director at ILM, Joe Johnston’s knack for design-heavy pictures made him Disney’s natural choice to direct THE ROCKETEER. It’s the company’s most daring project yet, with over \$35 million spent on a superhero practically no one has heard of, a period picture that required the rebuilding of 1930s Los Angeles, almost from scratch.

Johnston was a fan of Dave Stevens’ retro-comic, whose hero’s dangerous feats perhaps reminded the director of his risky love for flying ultralights. Without realizing that *The Rocketeer* was already in development, Johnston inquired about the rights, only to discover that



Joe Johnston, also director of HONEY I SHRUNK THE KIDS, on set with Campbell.

Disney held them. Johnston made inquiries and was handed the project and quickly given a green light.

“One of the great appeals of Stevens’ work was his attention to detail, which really placed the reader in the period,” noted Johnston. “I’ve tried to do the same thing cinematically. I’m a big fan of the ‘30s, and was very

conscious about having the production avoid anachronisms. THE ROCKETEER differs from a typical comic book film in several ways. He isn’t well known like Superman, which was very much in my favor. I could take liberties that wouldn’t have been possible if the Rocketeer had widespread exposure. The movie also doesn’t have the genre’s typical characters and situations. This takes place in the real world, and the only fantasy element involves technology instead of some unearthly power.”

Though Johnston entered the picture after several script drafts and directors had already flown by, his naturalistic approach was in line with that of screenwriters Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo, and most importantly,

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# ROCKETEER

## COMMANDO CODY REVISITED

*Comic artist Dave Stevens found inspiration in the jet-pack exploits of the movie serial heroes of the '40s and '50s.*

### VIDEOPHILE

by Bill Kelley

Heroic figures flying around with the aid of futuristic jet-packs have been a staple of pulp and comic book fiction since the '30s. But the first widespread use of the gimmick in a strictly contemporary setting came in 1949 with the first of three Republic Pictures serials featuring Rocketman and his successor, Commando Cody—all available on home video—the unmistakable inspiration for Dave Stevens' *The Rocketeer*.

After World War II, news spread that the U.S. Air Force was attempting to devise a jet-pack that would enable men to fly relatively short distances at low altitudes. Over the years, the concept has been all but

Holdren with Aline Town in Republic's *COMMANDO CODY* TV show of 1953.



Judd Holdren as the Rocketman in *ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE* (1952), facing a robot menace recycled from Republic's *MYSTERIOUS DR. SATAN* (1940).

abandoned, though a jetpack of sorts was developed in the '60s, used by a stuntman doubling for Sean Connery in the opening of *THUNDERBALL* (1965), proving to be a fairly cumbersome apparatus, not the sleek outfit serial fans marveled at a generation before.

Republic's Rocketman serials were produced long after the golden age of the weekly chapter play had passed—and they admittedly are short on both budget and imagination. Yet each has something to recommend it beyond the central, irresistible gimmick of the Rocketman suit itself, identical in all three serials, with its leather aviator jacket extending to mid-thigh, presumably so the Rocketman wouldn't scorch his butt while in flight.

The suit accessory best remembered by serial buffs is its handy control breastplate worn over the jacket, where, with the simple flick of a dial, the Rocketman could leap into the air ("ON/OFF"), descend onto an unwitting foe ("UP/

DOWN"), or regulate the speed of his escape or pursuit ("FAST/SLOW"). A lot of cliff-hanger endings hinged on whether the Rocketman, having been dumped out of a moving plane, shoved out a skyscraper window or left to perish in a raging inferno, would manipulate the dials on his control plate fast enough to propel himself to safety.

Each of the twelve-chapter serials was directed by Fred C. Brannon (one of Republic's latterday, journeymen hacks), and the whole lot was in and out of theatres in just three years; *KING OF THE ROCKET MEN* (1949), written by Royal Cole, William Lively and Sol Shor, and starring former serial bad guy (and pro baseball player) Tristram Coffin as Rocketman; *RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON* (1951), written by Ronald Davidson and starring George Wallace as Commando Cody; and *ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE* (1952), written by Davidson, with

serial veteran Judd Holdren (the lead in Columbia's *CAPTAIN VIDEO*, 1951) as Larry Martin.

Holdren went on to play Cody in twelve half-hour episodes of *COMMANDO CODY* that Republic filmed for television in 1953, the only part of the series not released on video. The serials are available in handsomely packaged, reasonably priced (\$29.95), two-cassette formats from Republic Home Video. Early this year, *RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON* was re-issued as a \$9.95 "budget" tape by Goodtimes Home Video (recorded at the slower, cheaper "LP" speed), but is missing the serial's last three chapters.

Of the actors appearing in the Rocketman serials, the best known to today's genre buffs are the supporting players. Wallace, who delivered an excellent, understated performance as the first Commando Cody—far better than most serial leads—can still be seen, white-haired and dapper, in current TV commercials for foods and other family products. He is currently on view as one of the judges in Albert Brooks' *DEFENDING YOUR LIFE*. But aficionados are more accustomed to searching *ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE* for an early appearance by an almost unrecognizable Leonard Nimoy (he plays Narab, an alien henchman who explains—and then demonstrates—how the Martians can hold their breath so long underwater) and for the appearance of a pre-*LONE RANGER* Clayton Moore as Graber, the principal gangster in *RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON*.

While the second and third



# KING OF THE ROCKET MEN



A REPUBLIC SERIAL  
IN 12 CHAPTERS

TRISTRAM COFFIN  
MAY CLARKE  
DICK MCGERTY  
JOHN PETERS, JR.  
WINFORD JOLLEY

WRITTEN BY  
FRED BRANNON  
DIRECTED BY  
ROYAL K. COLE  
WILLIAM LINDSEY  
COL. SHAW

Republic introduced Rocketman Larry King (Tristram Coffin) in this 12-chapter serial released in 1949, inspired by the news of Air Force jet pack experiments.

serials lamely tried to cash in on the burgeoning early '50s science fiction craze by having Commando Cody and Larry Martin battling aliens, the action is largely earthbound in all three serials. Apart from the fact that Republic wasn't very comfortable with—or, truth to tell, good at—interplanetary science fiction, there's another reason why all three serials stuck close to Earth. It afforded them an opportunity to fall back on all that great stock footage from the Republic vaults, showcasing the peerless special effects of Howard and Theodore Lydecker, including the use of realistic, large-scale miniatures, sometimes up to seven feet in height.

KING OF THE ROCKET MEN and RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON both open with stock disaster footage from the Republic vaults, the latter with the exploding oilfield from THE MASKED MARVEL (1943) and the

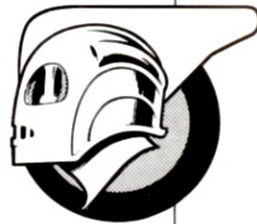
former with one of the greatest of all Republic effects, the slow destruction of an entire skyscraper, shot low angle as it tumbles down onto the audience, from the first chapter of CAPTAIN AMERICA (1944).

In the second two serials, and the COMMANDO CODY TV show starring Holdren, it isn't merely the disaster and car-wreck clips that are taken from earlier Republic serials. All of the flying scenes are lifted from KING OF THE ROCKET MEN, aside from a few process shots of the characters in close-up. The flying scenes were accomplished by the Lydeckers using a near-life-size dummy which, with arms outstretched, swooped hundreds of feet toward or away from the camera along invisible wires.

The plotlines in the three serials are rudimentary. It's significant that the latter two, which rely heavily on so much

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“Scenes thrown out were put back in. Disney was specific with line changes, with them liking the excised dialogue months later.”



er, and it was very frustrating for us. There were specific notes down to line changes, with them liking the excised dialogue three months later. Scenes that had been thrown out two years ago were put back in. What was the point?”

Some of Disney's biggest objections centered on Bilson and DeMeo's attempts at dialogue faithful to the '30s setting instead of throwing in modern parlance. “You might call Danny and me students of slang, a lot of which comes from being familiar with the literature and films of the period,” said DeMeo. “Stuff like ‘We searched the place from Hell to breakfast’ and ‘You’ve got a lot of moxie’ are throughout the movie. We ran into heavy resistance from Disney executives who felt no one would know what the characters were talking about. But we insisted that if the sayings were in the proper context, audiences would know exactly what was being said. The dialogue was meant to situate viewers in 1938 instead of turning the film into a parody.”

film gives his character more bathos. He starts out as a self-confident, almost selfish guy. When he finds the rocket pack, Cliff's first inclination is to make dough. But his character alters so he realizes that what's at stake is more important than him, because the device can threaten the security of the entire world. It also makes him realize that Jenny is the most important thing in his life, and he's ready to lay that down to save her.”

Bilson and DeMeo's five year collaboration with Stevens was at its closest during THE ROCKETEER's initial drafts. Just as the crew and cast were being assembled for THE ROCKETEER, Disney announced its acquisition of DICK TRACY from Universal. For DeMeo, another megabudget comic film seemed far more threatening to THE ROCKETEER than the script's Nazi menace. “I thought Disney was going to dump our

Terry O'Quinn as jet pack developer Howard Hughes, a change of pace from his dark role as THE STEPFATHER.

Eventually, in 1990, Bilson and DeMeo's third major re-write got the green light from Disney. The casting of Timothy Dalton as the film's movie star villain would necessitate their last character overhaul, making the best use of his Bond appeal gone bad. “Dalton as Neville became swashbuckling and charming, more like Douglas Fairbanks than an effete Claude Rains,” said DeMeo.

But through all the script incarnations, the one person to remain practically unaltered was Cliff Secord, who stays his brash, flyboy self. “I think you'll find Cliff to be pretty much as he's presented in the comic,” said DeMeo. “But the

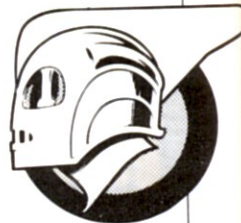




The Rocketeer faces gunmen lead by Sinclair's brutish henchman, played by Tiny Ron in makeup designed by Rick Baker to look like '40s horror star Rondo Hatton, unlike the comic strip. Inset: Hatton, who died in 1946.



“Two comic-based films set in the same period, released two years apart. **DICK TRACY** didn't match Disney's expectations.”



project, since two comic-based films set in the same time period was too much, especially if they would be released two years apart,” said DeMeo. “But **DICK TRACY** wasn't as destructive as I feared, especially when it didn't match the studio's expectations.”

When **THE ROCKETEER** finally started pre-production in early 1990, among the first crew members brought on board was production designer

James Bissell. With a background in theatrical set construction, Bissell's draftsmanship had realized some of the genre's most fantastic concepts, from the demonic cartoon house of **TWILIGHT ZONE-THE MOVIE** to **THE LAST STARFIGHTER**'s gleaming spaceport. Producer Larry Franco was put in charge of securing the locations for Bissell to work his design magic on. Having pro-

duced numerous John Carpenter films as well as overseeing **TANGO AND CASH**, Franco had contentedly settled into line producing when he received a call from the Gordon Company, whom he'd worked for on **BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA**.

Franco soon came aboard **THE ROCKETEER** as an executive producer in March of 1990, just as the sets and effects were being drawn up. “**APOCALYPSE NOW** might have been the biggest project I'd worked on before, but this has as many elements, including a tremendous amount of visuals and stunts, plus the logistical problems of it being a period picture,” said Franco. “First of all, it's 1938 Los Angeles, and we needed blue

skies instead of smog. That automatically precluded the Los Angeles basin, so we did extensive scouting for an airport in Northern California. We ended up finding an abandoned World War II landing strip in Santa Maria.” On the location Disney contracted the strip's mythical Chaplin Air Field.

**T**he Rocketeer's attack on a Nazi dirigible, filmed near the Magic Mountain Amusement Park in Indian Dunes, results in the film's most spectacular pyrotechnics, but the budgetary explosions going on at Disney's corporate offices in Burbank were even more formidable. Fearing that production, then two days over schedule, might career past **DICK TRACY**'s excesses, a Disney executive was dispatched to see that the movie wasn't at the hands of a stylistic auteur. “It was one of those situations where you're asked, ‘How can you guys be out there spending so much time and money?’” said Franco. “When the Disney person got up on the dirigible to see the explosions, their scale nearly caused him to lose balance. He was blown away with what we were accomplishing.”

Though **THE ROCKETEER** would ultimately come in fifty days over schedule, Franco doesn't see any fault lying with the production. “We all thought the script was great from the beginning, and our job was to execute it,” noted Franco. “Since **THE ROCKETEER** was a little bigger than we thought, it fell behind for the right reasons. There were weather and mechanical problems. It wasn't because everyone was sitting around while an actor threw a tantrum, or the script was being rewritten. Disney wouldn't let budgets go out of control, especially with our

## FLYING THE ROCKETEER

Stunt coordinator Jim Arnett was given the awesome task of making the Rocketeer fly. “The technology of how to fly people has been around for a long time,” said Arnett. “While we've done some unique speed shots, our work has been pretty basic. A lot of the techniques were very similar to **SUPERMAN**'s, especially since we brought in Bob Harmon, who did the rigging on those films. Essentially, we attached two wires to a harness that could be picked up in the hip area and balanced with the rocket pack. The Rocketeer then flies underneath a helicopter. There are very few times when you can hide those wires. Sometimes they can be painted out, but not with a high degree of success.”

Though Arnett managed to obscure the cables during



A Rocketeer stuntman, airborne on wires.

the acrobatic spacewalks he supervised for 2010, on **THE ROCKETEER** he had to jet a stuntman about in broad daylight, with the added complication of a flaming engine on his back. “The pack's supposed to propel him at about 300 m.p.h.,” said Arnett. “We managed some of that with camera speed, and had the helicopter

taking him at about 90 m.p.h. at 120 feet up. The wires had the Rocketeer going at about 15 m.p.h., but all the flying looks like it's over one hundred. The helmet restricted visibility, and the pack weighed fifty pounds. That's a lot when you're on wires. We shielded the pack and gave him insulated clothes to protect him from the engine's heat.”

The film's most spectacular trick involved the Rocketeer clinging to the back of a Standard mock-up, suspended by a helicopter. When the Rocketeer suddenly loses his grip, a stuntman goes into a hundred-foot free-fall. For this terrifying plunge, a parachute was built into a fake rocket pack. The slide to oblivion was repeated three times as the crew held their breaths. **Daniel Schweiger**

# ROCKETEER

## COMIC BOOK STARDOM

*Newcomer Bill Campbell on acting out childhood fantasies despite his fear of flying.*

*By Daniel Schweiger*

Bill Campbell, signed to star as the Rocketeer after an exhaustive talent search, has been given the biggest comic book break afforded to an unknown actor since Christopher Reeve was picked out of the soaps to play Superman. But when one notes Campbell's incredible resemblance to Dave Stevens' comic book hero Cliff Secord, right down to his happy-go-lucky demeanor, the casting of Campbell seems natural for the 31-year-old performer who almost became a commercial artist.

"I'm a bit of a dilettante as far as comics go, since I only collected a few for their art," said Campbell. "I was at the American Academy of Arts in Chicago before I got into acting, which looked like a lot of fun and less work. The alternative was to slave away at a drawing board doing someone else's work, or to go into this

incredibly vibrant field. But acting is the same thing as drawing for me. I fantasized a lot as a child, and art was an escape. I still daydream, but now I'm living my fantasies with THE ROCKETEER."

Campbell wasn't familiar with his comic counterpart when he got the part, and quickly immersed himself in Cliff Secord's mindset by reading the graphic novel, poring through tomes on aviation, and listening to period music. "When Cliff gets the rocket pack, it's as if he's discovered his soul," said Campbell. "It takes him to heights and places he's never been. To fly without wings has got to be every pilot's dream, if not every human's."

The aerial acrobatics required of Campbell's role as a stunt pilot proved good therapy for an actor trying to show a love for the skies, but who really wished to remain earthbound. "I have a fear of flying," admitted Campbell. Craig Hosking



Campbell as the Rocketeer, fantasy role playing not far from youthful daydreams.

the film's aerial coordinator helped Campbell over the hump of the film's flying scenes, filmed with real vintage planes at an airport set constructed near Santa Maria.

"I didn't have the first bit of nervousness with Hosking," said Campbell. "He's one of the best pilots in the United States, and was doing stuff that I couldn't believe over Santa Maria. He went over the airfield at an obscene 45-degree angle, then flew the plane sideways four feet off the runway. My folks were in the hangar and thought I was going to die, but my heart rate never went up."

To insure Campbell's safety, the actor was doubled for practically all of the Rocketeer's flying sequences. "The helmet fogs up when you're excited," said Campbell. "It's eerie because you can't see where you're going or what's happening. Because of that, the stunt people didn't want me flying."

Campbell is signed by Disney for two more sequels, if the first film is a success. "I don't see Cliff going into business as the Rocketeer, with him printing up cards and saving people," said Campbell of the direction future films might take. "That's one of the things that doesn't appeal to me about

comic book heroes. It's all a job for them. I think it would be neat if Cliff became a fighter pilot in World War II and ended up dueling a Nazi Rocketeer in the skies over Europe. But I'm not sure of who my Cliff is until I see the finished movie. I was incredibly lucky to have this break. At first I was a little nervous and not sure if I was up to the part, but THE ROCKETEER's been a great experience. I wish it would never end." □

Campbell as Cliff Secord, the feature film debut for the 31-year-old actor.



It's not all glamour—filming Campbell's spill in a duckpond, trying out his wings.



# ROCKETEER

## HEROES 'R' US

Writers Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, the producers of *THE FLASH*, nursed Dave Stevens' comic book to the screen.

By Daniel Schweiger

After years of being written off as kids' stuff by the mass media, comics have suddenly become hip again with the release of films like *DARKMAN*, *ROBOCOP*, and *BATMAN*. Taking a cue from such graphic novels as Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight* and Howard Chaykin's *American Flag*, these films injected their sunny source material with angst-ridden nihilism and villainous superheros. No creative team has jumped on this revisionist bandwagon with as much success or uncondescending enthusiasm as Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo, the scripters of *THE ROCKETEER* who also produce television's *noir*-drenched *THE FLASH*.

"It's no coincidence that we've done these projects," said DeMeo from his office at

Campbell, as American as apple pie, draped by Disney in the flag to tap the country's new-found patriotic fervor.



Bill Campbell as *THE ROCKETEER*, a cocky pilot getting set to try out his new jet pack powers with helmet fashioned by Peevy (Alan Arkin), his trusted mechanic.

Warner Bros, within running distance of *THE FLASH*'s enormous Central City sets. "I spent most of my idle youth reading comics, especially DCs. While Danny looked at them as a kid, he wasn't as voracious as me. We both dropped the books in college, then took another look when the undergrounds fused with the mainstream. Stuff like *The Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight* really appealed to us, especially since these all-American heroes were given an adult thrust."

DeMeo and Bilson's partnership, the most prolific team-up since the formation of the Justice League, began at California State, when the two theatre art majors wrote "The Houdini Deception" as their senior thesis. As their first major effort the script effectively demonstrated their talent for giving legends colorful life, as Sherlock Holmes became embroiled in a case involving the notorious magician and the luscious German spy Mata Hari. The property is still in

active development in Hollywood.

Upon graduating in 1978, Bilson and DeMeo moved to Los Angeles, where they sold spec scripts, including one that was almost turned into a Richard Pryor vehicle. The duo would really exploit their comic book sensibilities at Empire Pictures, writing a future cop's adventures for *TRANCERS*, having beasts fight one another at a space *ARENA*, teaming a mandroid,

ninja, and mercenary in *THE ELIMINATORS*, and bringing space beings into World War II with *ZONE TROOPERS*, Bilson's first directing effort. Bilson and DeMeo originally approached Rocketeer creator Dave Stevens to work on *ZONE TROOPERS*, an assignment Stevens passed on due to other commitments.

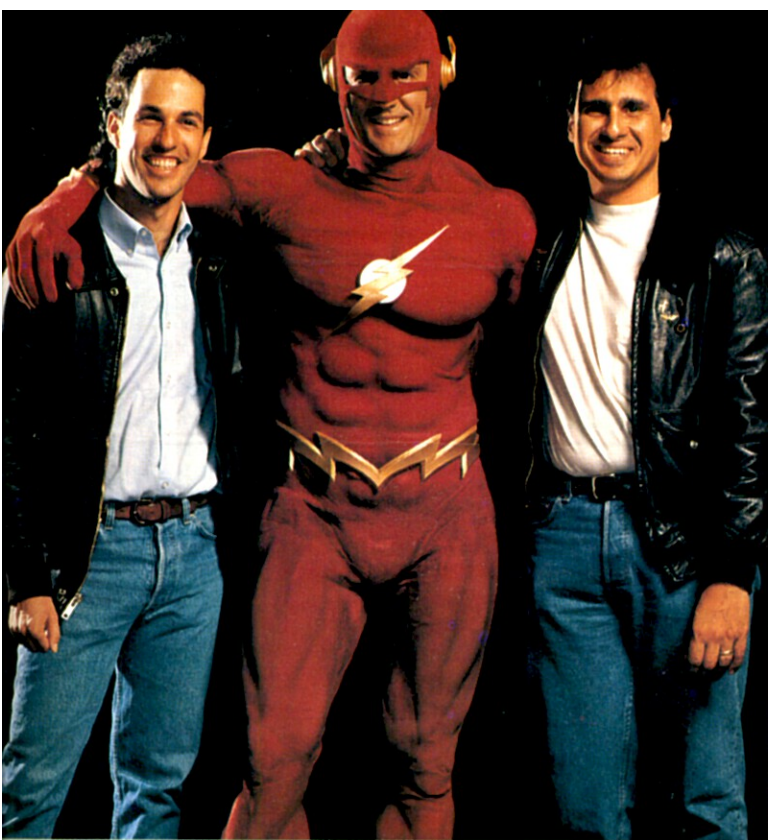
With Bilson and DeMeo being present for on-set rewrites on *THE ROCKETEER* and creative consultation with director Joe Johnston, the team made great efforts to see that their vision of the film wouldn't be compromised during its big-budget treatment. "It's a general rule that unless a writer is producing and directing his own material, the filmmaker will usually imprint the script with his own ideas. That's the age-old problem of the screenwriter in Hollywood. A couple of our scripts were compromised in that way, but it was always in proportion to our involvement with the project.

"The difference between *THE FLASH* and *THE ROCKETEER* is that we're the bosses

Filming Campbell at the controls of his air circus stunt plane on the set of the Chaplin Airdrome built in Santa Maria, director Joe Johnston observes far right.







Bilson (l) and DeMeo pose with John Wesley Shipp, star of their CBS-TV series.

on our show," continued DeMeo. "We go through all the material, and anything that's on the set has been approved by us. Dave Stevens helped us on design work, including the Central City police badges and the suit's initial revisions. THE ROCKETEER is a major production with a lot of money involved, but I think you'll find the finished movie is very close to what we intended. Though it's inevitable that some scenes aren't what we envisioned, it's still going great if 75% of what we wrote comes out on screen. I know Stevens is going to love it when it comes out, especially because we worked so closely with him. Dave knows that it will always be his project."

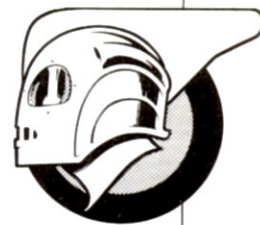
THE ROCKETEER promises to justify Bilson and DeMeo's mission of bringing comic book heroes into the brave new world of the '90s, now that people aren't so quick to scoff at men in tights. The writers seem to have hit on a winning formula for a public overcome by war and pessimism, showing that good guys can share their dark side, and that creative partnerships can flourish in the midst of decidedly real studio machinations.

"Danny and I have known each other for over a decade,

and it's been ideal for such a successful partnership," said DeMeo. "Sometimes we want to kill each other, but that's like any two friends who spend a lot of time together. You need similar backgrounds and tastes to write over twenty scripts, and produce so many television shows. I'm not saying that our collaboration will go on forever, but it's worked so far."

Bilson and DeMeo's creative control of the effects-filled FLASH looks to be certain as the show's increasing popularity makes it a likely candidate for next season's renewal on CBS. "Our goal is to ride the edge of revisionist comics as much as television will allow," said DeMeo of his work with Bilson, producing THE FLASH. "We write together in the same room, with computer monitors facing each other. We even have Howard Chaykin, the *American Flagg's* creator, as our story editor. The production duties are also divided between us. While Danny's off in the editing room, I'll be at the sound mix. When we're making a feature that he's directing, I'm watching his back creatively, and making sure that all the elements in front of the camera are correct." □

**"There was very little waste. Compare the scope of THE ROCKETEER to DIE HARD II, you'll be shocked what we spent."**



film. But when you compare THE ROCKETEER's scope with DIE HARD II's, you'll be shocked at the money we actually spent. There's very little waste in this picture."

With a \$3.5 million design budget, production designer James Bissell echoed those sentiments, pointing out that THE ROCKETEER got the most for Disney's big-budget bucks. "There's a lot of money being spent on sets these days, especially at Amblin," said Bissell. "TOTAL RECALL wasn't a slouch either when it came to production design, since that film was practically constructed. THE ROCKETEER's wonderful design quality is owed to its dramatic structuring. There are no throwaway sets or scenes, since everything has a sense of place and dramatic purpose."

While a director with Johnston's effects background might be tempted to optically overpower THE ROCKETEER, Bissell actually saw Johnston's background as a reason for the picture's grand economy. "I have tremendous respect for Joe, because he works well with actors and understands the material,"

said Bissell. "He knows what effects will come to his rescue, and how to shoot things quickly and efficiently. But like anyone who's worked with effects, Joe will be inclined to look for a visual solution to some dramatic problems. Overall, he's got a very balanced approach between directing and effects. He's a wonderful collaborator."

Franco also gave Johnston high marks. "You don't have to be in awe about how Joe directs," said Franco. "While he's been criticized because of his effects background, THE ROCKETEER's preparation was centered around that. Once we were ready to go, the visuals were the last thing on



Right: Jennifer Connelly as Jenny, the heroine of Disney's THE ROCKETEER. Below: Cheesecake model Betty Page the Rocketeer's girl in Stevens' strip.



# ROCKETEER

## BETTY PAGE

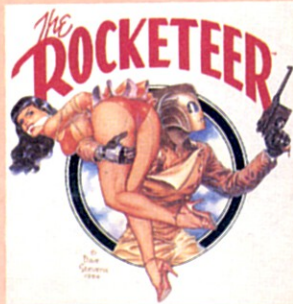
*The body behind the beauty on why the strip's sultry heroine was dropped.*

By Bill George

Some fans of comic artist Dave Stevens' *The Rocketeer* are sure to be disappointed to learn that Betty, the strip's pin-up queen heroine, won't be making an appearance in Disney's big-budget movie version. "They're white-washing the eroticism, omitting the lingerie and bondage from the movie," said Brinke Stevens, the movie actress who posed for the comic's lovingly rendered damsel in distress. "It's a Disney movie so it has to be sanitized. If anyone wants to get the full flavor of *The Rocketeer*, they should go back to the original comic books."

Betty, dubbed "Betty Page" by fans of the strip, named for the '50s cheesecake

Art Imitates Life: Stevens said this famous image of Betty embarrassed during a photo session sprung from her husband's dislike of her modeling career.



Disney sought to avoid the bondage and sexual fetishism angle of the strip, immortalized on T-shirts.

photography model who was Stevens' inspiration, is replaced in the movie by Jenny, a would-be movie starlet played by Jennifer Connelly, positively demure next to the images of the comic's erotically-charged heroine. "One of the most popular images of Betty Page is the t-shirt artwork where she's bound, gagged, slung over the Rocketeer's shoulder, and wearing little more than an angry expression," noted Stevens. "I posed for that sketch, bound, gagged, leaning over the back of a sofa, trying to communicate with Dave with this 'Will you hurry up and take this picture!' type of glare." Stevens laughed at the recollection.

Stevens, a reigning Scream Queen of low budget horror and science fiction films like *NIGHTMARE SISTERS* (1988) and *BAD GIRLS FROM MARS* (1991), began to pose for Betty during her six month marriage to the comic artist in 1980. Noted Stevens, "When Dave married me his friends commented, 'Oh, you've found your Betty Page.' He continued to photograph or draw me, as Betty Page, for almost a decade after our marriage dissolved. He was obsessed with us... Betty and me."

According to Stevens, her former husband developed much of *The Rocketeer* during their courtship and marriage. Much of the comic's dialogue, said Stevens, are verbatim transcripts of real-life conversations between herself and her ex-husband. The stories were also a reflection of their personal lives. "I'll give you an example," said Stevens. "I was modeling for *Playboy* photographer Ken Marcus in '80 or '81. Dave was very jealous, so he went ahead and created the famous 'Wow!' drawing; it's the artwork of a shocked Betty Page, crossing her arms over her breasts, as two goons bust in on her nude photography session. As usual, I was drawn as Betty. And Dave drew the photographer to very closely resemble Ken Marcus, turning him into a character



Brinke Stevens, former wife of *Rocketeer* creator Dave Stevens, who posed for the strip's Betty, an actress with aspirations to play the character on film.

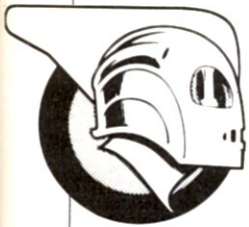
named Marco of Hollywood. The cartoon strip cuts to the *Rocketeer*, Dave's counterpart, laughing hysterically and saying, 'God, I wish I could have been there to see the look on her face. *Serves her right.*' It was Dave's fantasy of me getting my just desserts."

Though their marriage was short-lived, the actress and artist retained a professional relationship. Stevens continued to pose for renderings of Betty Page until 1988. But despite her film experience and aspirations to break out of the low-budget horror field, Stevens said she was never contacted about acting in the Disney film. "I didn't expect to be given the job just because I was once married to the creator of *The Rocketeer*," said Stevens. "It's just that I wanted the opportunity to try out for a part. Dave was given associate producer status. All I needed was someone to say, 'Call this girl for an audition' and no one did. I felt very hurt by that."

Stevens continues to work in horror films, but has branched out into writing as well as acting. Her latest film is *TEEN-AGE EXORCIST*, a script she wrote and co-stars in with Eddie Deezen. As a writer, Stevens also collaborated with celebrated science fiction author A.E. van Vogt on "The Pandora Principle" for *Weird Tales* magazine. Despite her disappointment about not getting to try out for *THE ROCKETEER*, Stevens said she's still

continued on page 60





**“THE ROCKETEER is Joe Johnston’s vision. Disney might like to get involved, but there’s hardly anything here that was dictated.”**

his mind. Joe knows what he wants and how to get it, especially because he was an art director at ILM. Joe does a lot of his own storyboarding, and understands what happens when you change your mind in mid-stream. He’s also receptive to ideas and comments, and is very subtle about how he gets performances from the actors. Disney might like to get involved with the wardrobe and sets, but **THE ROCKETEER** is Joe’s vision. There’s hardly anything here that was dictated.”

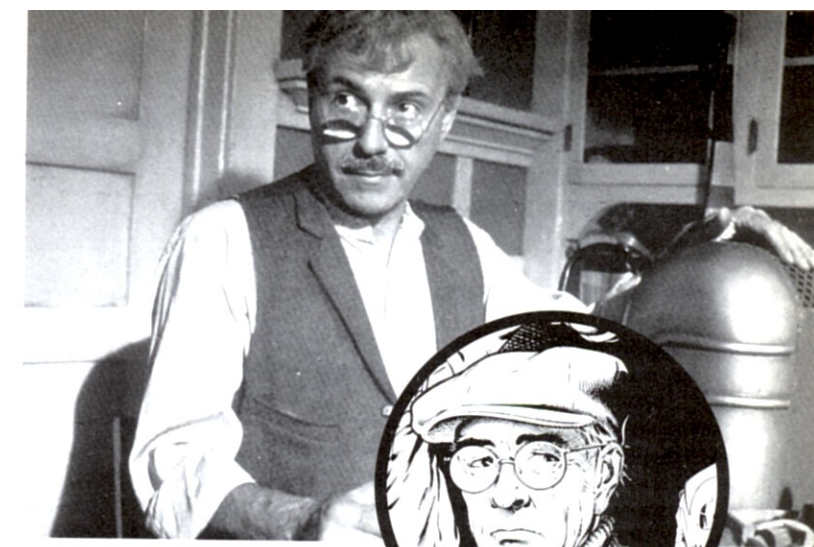
**K**ey to the team spirit fostered by director Joe Johnston was his collaboration with comic creator Dave Stevens, who gets a co-producing credit on the film. Stevens’ commercial art background included designing storyboards for videos and movies, among them Michael Jackson shorts and concepts for **RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK**.

“Because of my production savvy, I could come on the set and be more hip to the adaptation process,” said Stevens. “I had a good relationship with Joe, since we were all concerned with making **THE ROCKETEER** the best film possible. I was on it from September 10th until January 23rd. Everyone knew it was going to be a tough film to do, by nature of the sets and visual effects. It took a lot of work and long hours, but everyone was dedicated to making **THE ROCKETEER** happen. The good thing about being constantly on the set was generating ideas when they were needed. We were asked to pitch in, and I was there to work like anyone else. One night at Indian Dunes, Joe needed a zeppelin hatch with a stylized German number on it. So I jotted down a sketch for the set

painter, and he realized it right before the shot. That numeral’s quite visible in the movie.”

During filming, Bilson and DeMeo were on set, when needed, to supervise dialogue. “When our services were recalled for the third and final time, it was to polish the script and have us on call for on-set rewrites,” said DeMeo. “Joe Johnston would do a cut and paste of the script where he’d make deletions, move things around and then send the notes to us. That let us stay a week or two ahead of the shooting schedule.”

Of the half-dozen times when Bilson and DeMeo played script surgeons, the most urgent dialogue operation would occur inside Sinclair’s house as the braggart



Alan Arkin as Peevy, the Rocketeer’s trusted mechanic, fashioning a helmet from old equipment. Inset: The strip’s Peevy, which Stevens based on his dad.



performer strikes an uneasy alliance with mobster Eddie Valentine. “When the crew was close by at Indian Dunes or the studio lot it was easy for us to run down to the set,” said DeMeo. “They called us to the Disney soundstage at 9:00 p.m. and we were there until two in the morning hashing out the dialogue. Timothy Dalton and Paul Sorvino had a lot of ideas on how to dramatically refocus the scene, so between their

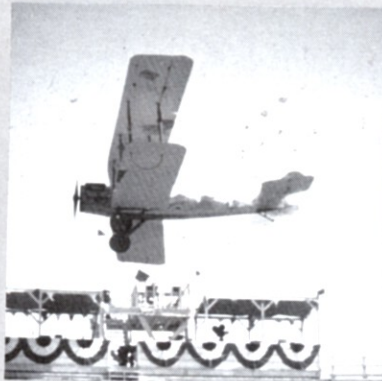
thoughts, Joe’s and ours, the conversation had to be torn apart and put back together again. We ran back to our offices, rewrote the scene until six in the morning, and had it ready for the next day’s shoot.”

With a final exterior sequence of the Rocketeer making an impression at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre going unfiled, Disney’s epic completed production on January 10th, after

## VINTAGE AIRPLANES

When **THE ROCKETEER** filmed at the Chaplin Airfield, a movie set built on an old World War II landing strip in Santa Maria, 700 extras and 25 vintage planes were gathered to recreate an air circus. Aerial coordinator Craig Hosking was in charge of wrangling the film’s rare “birds” and charting their hotdog maneuvers.

“What makes **THE ROCKETEER** so unique was having several one-of-a-kind planes that hadn’t flown in years,” said Hosking, who supervised the dog-fights of **WAR AND REMEMBRANCE**. “We used a 1916 Standard, which was a rickety-looking bi-wing. There was also a round-nosed and small-winged Geebee, which was the fastest racing plane of its time. That one was a bit difficult to



Craig Hosking supervised the flying circus of vintage planes at the Chaplin Airdrome.

operate.” For the air circus sequences in the film, Hosking coordinated the flying of up to six vintage planes at a time.

Though **THE ROCKETEER**’s vintage aircraft may have been authentic, filming the view of the ground as seen from the air posed more difficulties than flying above it. “It’s tricky doing a period

film, because you can’t show that the ground isn’t 1938 anymore,” said Hosking. “The camera sees a vast point-of-view when you’re up in the air, and we tried to block it by shooting from behind the pilot’s head. We used a three cockpit plane that had been especially modified for filming, with me flying in the front and the back half made to look like the Geebee. The camera was in the second seat pointing at Bill [Campbell] and the fake canopy, and I taught him where to look and how the controls operated. Then [director] Joe [Johnston] used cutaways of me in the real Geebee, wearing Cliff’s outfit. On film, it’s one of the most aggressive attempts to convince an audience that the actor’s really flying the plane.” **Daniel Schweiger**

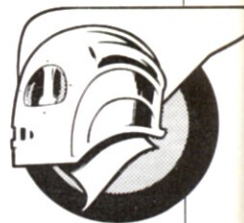


The Rocketeer's flight, ILM effects with the kinetic force of CLOSE ENCOUNTERS' UFOs.

five intense months of shooting. Johnston immediately went to San Francisco to help ILM effects supervisor Ken Ralston complete the flying sequences, so important to THE ROCKETEER's success. Johnston reportedly insisted on ILM to handle the film's effects work to make use of their Computer Graphics Imaging technology to optically remove the wires visible in the Rocketeer's flying scenes.

The movie promises to be the kind of audience wish-fulfillment that Disney excels in, providing viewers with a glimpse of what could have happened, as if viewed with the unbridled enthusiasm of the studio's founder. "THE ROCKETEER as a movie and a comic is like an old picture in its values," said DeMeo. "The one aspect that's off is its technological device being a menace to the world, because people

**“The spirit is there and that’s what counts,” said Dave Stevens. “If I did the movie myself it wouldn’t be all that much different.”**



thought a lot higher of science than.”

Rather than rest on their laurels, with the film out of the way, Bilson and DeMeo helped creator Dave Stevens write the conclusion of his Rocketeer graphic saga. “That will bring the comic up to eight issues,” said DeMeo. “It’s impressive for such a small book to have such a large following. That’s because Dave’s a careful and self-demanding draftsman. The series’ conclusion won’t be appearing until just before the film is released in late June.”

Disney hopes to turn the success of THE ROCKETEER into a franchise, and creator Stevens anticipates movie

success turning his strip into a cottage industry. But Stevens plans to give up drawing the strip once the double-sized conclusion of his second serial appears, co-authored by Bilson and DeMeo. “I’m not a cartoonist by nature or trade,” said Stevens. “I’m an illustrator who does comics. They’re nothing but back-breaking drudgery, and I have no patience for doing them. I love the medium, but I’ll never make it a career. Even though I won’t ever go back to drawing the Rocketeer, I will write and art direct it. There will probably be several different artists who will do the strip, since it’s not an easy comic to draw. There’s a lot of historical reference in it, and you have to love that time period in order to draw it. A lot of people aren’t ready to put in that much concentration.”

Stevens’ last job etching the Rocketeer will be for a series of gallery quality prints, which Disney will sell at prices far beyond the comic. But the flying man’s creator is giddy about the enthusiasm that the movie will hopefully unleash among its viewers, the return to high-flying nostalgia that he originally envisioned. “I think THE ROCKETEER will be a treat for young viewers unfamiliar with pre-war America,” said Stevens. “They can sink back into a really vital period, and see what 1930s Los Angeles was like. Jim Bissell and his gang came up with amazingly accurate sets. They’ve gotten everything I’ve imagined exactly right, and there’s no glaring mistake about the film that I could point a finger to. Overall, I’d say THE ROCKETEER is the truest adaptation of a comic that’s ever been seen. If I were to do the movie myself, it wouldn’t be all that much different. The spirit is there, and that’s what counts.” □

## THE SOUTH SEAS CLUB

The dimensions of THE ROCKETEER’s South Seas Club would put Indiana Jones’ Club Obi-Wan to shame. This glamorous temple of ill repute is where the film’s mobsters and movie stars hold court, including impersonations of Clark Gable and W.C. Fields. “I hope we captured the ‘Hollywood’ look with the South Seas Club,” said production designer James Bissell. “It has a slightly tacky elegance, since it’s more for show than class. It borders on kitsch. So in the end you’re rooting for the Rocketeer to trash the joint.” Which he does.

The trademark of South Seas’ gaucheness is its giant plaster clam, from which a crooner emerges like Venus on the half shell. “That was one of the most difficult things to build,” said art



Production designer James Bissell’s idea of the epitome of Hollywood gaucheness.

director Chris Burian-Mohr. “It had to be big enough for a person to come out of, but light enough so we could open it mechanically. On top of that, it had to hold water. We used Rosebowl float technology, and made a beautiful frame that was carved and coated.”

It proved far easier for Bissell to design the South Seas

Club for its aerial demolition by the Rocketeer. “After working with so many effects, you learn to roll with the punches,” said Bissell. “We left enough room overhead for the track systems, and used colors, wallpaper, and columns to hide the obvious devices that would have to be used. The club’s round construction was dictated by the scene’s flying demands and a huge overhead rig sending the Rocketeer flying about in circles and ellipses.

But what the South Seas Club best exemplified for Bissell was his use of color. “whenever you’re going to stick to convention on any period film, it’s going to be a ‘brown’ movie, which is sepia-toned,” said Bissell. “We used richly saturated colors, especially in the South Seas.”

**Daniel Schweiger**

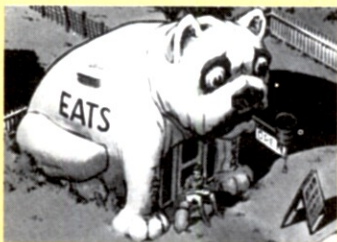
# ROCKETEER

## PRODUCTION DESIGN

*Recreating the look and feel of an era anchored the comic book heroics in a '40s realism.*

*By Daniel Schweiger*

With its numerous locations in an architecturally crazed Los Angeles, **THE ROCKETEER** would present production designer James Bissell with a daunting challenge: recapture Hollywood in its World War II infancy. "For **THE ROCKETEER**, I was looking for that naive American optimism so prevalent in the '30s," said Bissell, "we often re-evaluate a period and take the best thing from it, and that kind of revivalism is a very healthy cultural phenomenon. My concentration in the design process is always to look for the dramatic truth, to delineate the subconscious text of the script.

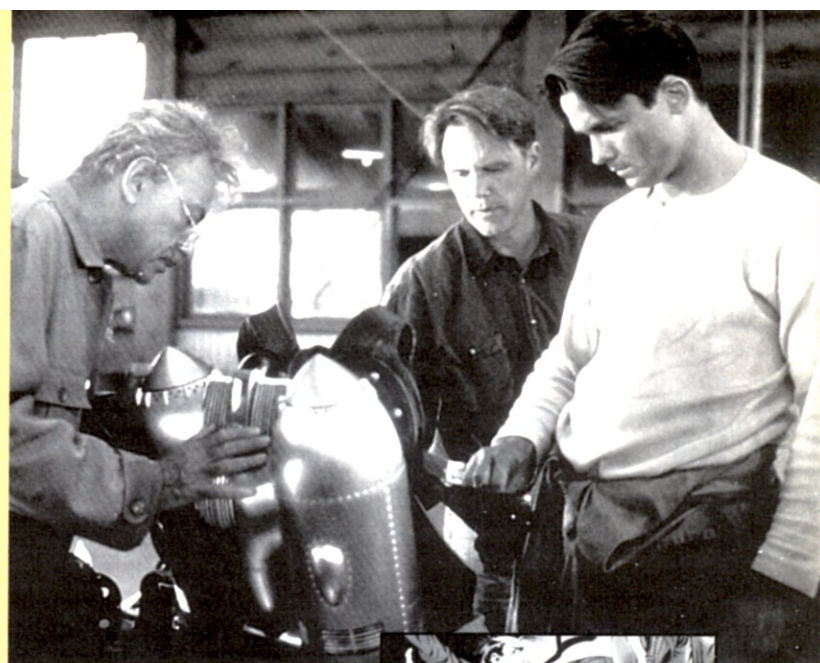


I've always been intrigued by that method, and try to work closely with the director to hit the writing's visual rhythm."

Unfortunately for **DICK TRACY**, the absolute need to capture comic nostalgia resulted in a film where set design dwarfed the humanity, a pitfall that Bissell said he was determined to avoid. "The designer and the director have to decide when the imagery should be stunning, and when it should recede into the background," noted Bissell. "It's an instinctual thing. When you break all the rules of visual syntax and set new ones like **DICK TRACY**, you're constantly aware of this comic strip reality. For **THE ROCKETEER**, we tread a very fine line between having that visual flair and not making it uniquely omnipresent.

"You can do a couple of streamlined art deco designs

Filming at the Bulldog Cafe, Bissell's recreation of Stevens' greasy spoon at the Chaplin Airdrome (left), modeled on an actual chain of diners in the '40s.



Joe Johnston directs Alan Arkin (l) and Bill Campbell (r) with the rocket pack. Inset: The comic's jet pack, modified by production designer James Bissell.



and get the '30s atmosphere," said Bissell. "But I didn't want **THE ROCKETEER** to evoke only a 'look.' We needed a feeling of what was right and interesting about the period, and because this was a fantasy, absolute accuracy wasn't important. When one of our sets was based on an actual place, we modified it to suit our dramatic needs. There's no fascination with detail."

One of Bissell's most radical changes would be the design of the Rocketeer's back pack, changing comic artist Dave Stevens' bulky thruster into twin boosters that would make for a visually pleasing, and cinematically workable device. "I was especially happy when Jim's crew redesigned my rocket pack," said Stevens. "I was never happy with my conception of it, and now the thruster's been changed from something resembling a toy bomb into a replica of a functioning engine. Now it actually fires like a jet!"

**THE ROCKETEER**'s most impressive sets revolve around the character's aerial milieu, from Howard Hughes' hangar-office to a giant prop zeppelin and the Chaplin Airfield. "I'm getting pretty good at building airports after **ALWAYS**," quipped Bissell. "I haven't flown as a pilot in four years, but I've hung around the places long enough to know what feels right."

Summing up the importance of **THE ROCKETEER**'s design, Bissell noted, "There's a clarity in the way the sets are contrasted. You have a cafe where the guys who fly by the seat of their pants hang out, and then that's put against the high-tech approach of Howard Hughes' office. But both sets are real honest and American. There's a quality of optimism and ingenuity that makes them wonderful to look at and identify with. That helps **THE ROCKETEER** take the process of turning a comic into a major motion picture to a new level of sophistication. It's fun, visceral, and exciting." □

Production designer James Bissell at the Chaplin Airfield in Santa Maria.



# THE BONEYARD

**Makeup wiz cum director James Cummins cast Diller for comedy/horror weirdness.**

*By Tim Vandehey*

"It's a family film in that it has a dog, an old lady, and three kids," said James Cummins, director of *THE BONEYARD*.

True enough, if your family happens to consist of three kids who are actually 300-year-old, flesh-eating ghouls, an old lady who transforms into a ten-foot monster, and a family poodle which takes it into its head to become a snarling, gigantic, carnivorous Poodle from Hell. Cummins' film, which hits video shelves June 12, also features a couple of scared cops, an obese, reluctant psychic, and a teen near-suicide, all running around in that most cheery of places, the county morgue. Sounds like family fare.

Cummins, a former makeup and mechanical effects designer, makes his directorial debut with *THE BONEYARD*, based on his own screenplay. Cummins has worked on such films as *HOUSE, ENEMY MINE*, and *COCOON* under effects Oscar-winners like Stan Winston, Chris Walas, and Stephen Dupuis. Cummins said his film is a simple return to the thrilling horror films of yesteryear. "To me, it's an old-fashioned horror film," he said. "As much as I'd like to think there's allegory, there just isn't. It's heavy on character, starts out slow, gets going pretty fast, and then it's over. It's like the old

**"It's played straight but there are laughs," said Cummins. "You can't have a nine-foot-tall killer poodle and not get laughs. It rolls along and gets stranger and stranger."**



Diller as morgue receptionist Miss Poopinplatz, with her poodle Floofsoms.

horror films *THEM* and *IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE*, where you develop your characters and wait for the giant insect to come out."

In this case, the giant insect is a series of undead Chinese ghouls and the beings the ghouls infect, which in turn become ghouls themselves. According to Cummins, the characters are what make his film different. "All the charac-

ters are people who aren't your typical boy or girl next door," he said. "The lead character is a 350-pound psychic lady. The other lead female is a character who's come into the morgue after trying to commit suicide, and she wakes up on the autopsy table as they're starting to cut into her. The cop is this kind of pompous character. The characters have this kind of glossy, comic book patina,

but they are really very odd. That kind of breaks down your resistance to them, and you can sympathize with them more."

The oddest of the odd in this motley group is the morgue's bitchy night receptionist Miss Poopinplatz, played by an uncharacteristically un-wigged Phyllis Diller. As a comedienne, Diller has become notorious over the years for her numerous cosmetic surgeries and outrageous, extravagant wigs and clothes. She makes a complete departure from that image in this film, thanks to an accident and the convincing of Cummins.

"Phyllis came down from this room of wigs in her house," he said, "wearing this schoolmarm-type wig and outfit with this high Victorian collar. I said, 'No, that's not it,' and when she bent over to adjust her wig, it fell off. She looked at me with pure shock on her face like, 'Oh my God. They've seen me without my wig!' I just kept my cool and said, 'Why don't you do it like that?' She has this very thin, white hair that was perfect for Poopinplatz, this austere, SS type of character. So she did the film that way, and now she does her stand-up shows without her wig."

Poopinplatz gets bitten by the child ghouls and rises as a ten-foot undead hag with huge hanging breasts, fangs, and claws, a special effects puppet. Poopinplatz' French poodle,



Effects creator Bill Corso and the Poodle from Hell, Floofsoms as a giant ghoul.

Floofsoms, does its undead bit by transforming into a ferocious nine-foot killer dog, complete with bouffant hairdo and giant pink ribbon (don't ask how the ribbon grew; this is fantasy, remember?), becoming what is surely the ultimate revenge fantasy for every Beverly Hills poodle that has ever been forced to wear a monogrammed sweater or beg for caviar.

Cummins revels in his film's bizarre nature. "The film gets more absurd the further you get into it," he said. "It's played purely straight. But there are laughs; you just cannot have a nine-foot-tall killer poodle and not get laughs. It stops the movie cold. It's not horror comedy. It's not even black comedy. It just rolls along and gets stranger and stranger."

Playing it straight was about the only option for the film, since the entire project was shot at the end of 1989 during a frenetic five weeks in rural Statesville, North Carolina on

a budget of less than \$5 million, a pittance for any effects film these days. Cummins, however, doesn't view his film as a schlock potboiler. "From the time we began this project," he said, "I've never felt like we were working on a low-budget film. That was never my attitude. My intent was to do a horror film that still had integrity. I didn't want to see someone's breasts falling out; that's

Cummins with the film's child ghouls, based on the Chinese myth of the "kyoshi."



cliche by now."

One of the most unusual facets of the film is the reason for the existence of the ghouls, an idea based on actual legend. The curse is derived from a Chinese myth about ghouls called *kyoshi*. In this case, the children are not dead, only in hibernation. Seems they actually died back in 16th century China, and were brought back to un-life by a sorcerer. However, whenever they get hungry they attack living people, so the curse of this family and its descendants through the centuries has been to keep these kids locked up and fed, until someone screws up at the film's beginning and lets them out.

As the pre-pubescent ghouls, child actors were made to look first like radically decomposed corpses, then like filthy, skeletal, blood-smearred ravenous monsters. The use of children posed a dilemma for Cummins, who was cautiously aware of the public vilification leveled at *PET SEMATARY* when that film portrayed the child character of Gage Creed as a knife-wielding demon. But in *THE BONEYARD*, the children are seen in their dead state only through a television monitor in the morgue. By such creative filming, Cummins hopes to avoid ratings hassles or public outcry. "I deliberately set it up to avoid difficult scenes with the children," he said. "I expected problems with their use, but the things that happen to them happen while they are in the guise of the creatures."

Bill Corso, who had worked with Oscar-winning special effects expert Rick Baker on *GREMLINS 2*, as well as on



Diller in ghoul form, a Corso puppet.

the ill-fated remake of *THE BLOB*, was signed on by Cummins to create the undead creatures in *THE BONEYARD* with little money and less time. "There's not enough time" became the byword of the project, and it drove Corso nuts, especially when the tight schedule caused problems with the filming of his favorite effect, the little dead girl at the film's beginning.

At 22, Corso seems too damned young to be making ghouls for a living. Fresh-faced, exuberant, and given to high-pitched shrieks to emphasize a point of frustration or anger, Corso is the antithesis of the burnt-out Hollywood makeup designer, ulcer-ridden from years of meeting impossible schedules and enduring frantic directors and livid producers. There's a good reason for that: *THE BONEYARD* was his first film as special effects makeup designer, and he says it's an experience he'd rather not repeat.

"When we did this thing," said Corso, "James [Cummins] told me, 'I don't have a lot of time, but we have enough time.' Now, pre-production time was only two months. Here you have full makeup on this little dead girl, millions of prosthetics for these little kids, and two 12-foot-tall monsters.

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**Director Michael Reeves, during set-up on location, filming WITCHFINDER GENERAL in 1967. Just 22 years-old at the time, less than two years later Reeves was dead of an overdose of barbiturates and alcohol, but his film legacy lives on.**



# MICHAEL REEVES

## HORROR'S JAMES DEAN

**Dead at 24, with three horror films to his credit, Reeves' legacy still endures.**

*By Bill Kelley*

In July, 1968, during a New York press showing of American International's *THE CONQUEROR WORM*, a female newspaper critic stood up in the middle of the screening room and, blocking the image on the screen, angrily announced that she was leaving, and that anyone who remained to watch the rest of the movie was "sick." Seconds later, she stormed out the door—alone.

This event, occurring years before the advent of the splatter film—indeed months before a movie rating system permitting explicit content was implemented in the U.S.—initially seems only to reflect the puritanical response with which critics have habitually greeted horror films.

If *THE CONQUEROR WORM* was all but ignored by the American press during its initial release, it was not received indifferently in Britain. Margaret Hinxman of the *Sunday Telegraph* denounced the film—released in England under its original title, *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*—as "a



Vincent Price (r) gave one of his most chilling performances as historical witch hunter Matthew Hopkins in Reeves' 1968 masterpiece *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*.

sadistic extravagance." Michael Reeves, who had both directed the film and co-authored its screenplay, found himself in the curious position of having to defend himself twice—the first time before the British censor, who trimmed seven minutes from the picture, and a second time before the press.

Less than a year later, Reeves was dead, having perished from an apparently accidental overdose of alcohol and sedatives—he was under a doctor's care for treatment of anxiety and depression—on February 11, 1969. A coroner's investigation ruled out suicide. Reeves was only 24 years old when he died—yet he had directed, in *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, the most influential British horror film since Hammer reintroduced the classics a decade before.

Reeves was one of the first members of a generation of directors who were consumed by a lifelong passion for movies, which led them to quickly graduate from film buff to filmmaker. Reeves inspired loyalty and adulation among both colleagues and fans likened to the cult of martyrdom that enshrined the legendary James Dean. Like Dean, Reeves left a legacy of three features, which

*Color photographs from  
WITCHFINDER GENERAL  
by Philip Waddilove*



Reeves and Price during the filming of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* at Brandeston, an historic English site. Below: The procession of villagers as witch hunter Hopkins takes two suspected witches to the moat for dunking, and then a hanging.



continue to be studied today. Within months of Reeves' death, *THE CONQUEROR WORM* began to receive the critical attention it was denied during its initial theatrical release. First came Robin Wood's enthusiastic assessment in *Movie* magazine ("In Memoriam Michael Reeves," Winter 1969-70). Then the American alternative press—notably William Paul in New York's *Village Voice*—and finally, David Pirie, in his 1974 book, *A Heritage of Horror*, who contended the film and its director occupy "a pivotal position in the history of English cinema," beginning a new tradition of genre filmmaking. Surely, any director who can be said to have started a tradition in film style on the basis of only three features merits serious consideration. *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*'s meticulous attention to 17th century detail, its breath-

taking cinematography, the understated authority of Vincent Price's performance—easily his best in a horror film—and the striking originality of its script make it difficult to understand how the movie could have been regarded as a mere exploitation thriller. Clearly, it was aiming higher, particularly in its depiction of violence, hypocrisy and superstition as lethal contagions. Regardless of the press reaction, *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*'s considerable mayhem and fleeting nudity thrilled American-International Pictures. Reeves had the good fortune to anticipate a substantial change in cinematic attitudes. "Leave the children home . . . and if you are squeamish, stay home with them!" screamed the ads, and perhaps for the first time in American International's history, there was no hyperbole. Reeves' film delivered what it promised.

three full-length features: *THE SHE BEAST* (1965), *THE SORCERERS* (1967), and *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* (1968). Unlike most genre movies of the period, Reeves' films lack humor, apart from the unrelated comedy relief shoehorned into them for alleged commercial purposes. There is dark wit and irony in Reeves' films, but he considered their broader, deeper themes no laughing matter, and he did not want their impact upon his audiences diluted.

Prior to directing his first feature, Reeves directed a small portion of Warren Kiefer's *CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD* (1963), an Italian production starring Christopher Lee as a sinister nobleman who transforms his guests into living statues. "Michael Reeves was the first, second and third assistant director," Lee recalled wryly. "He had incredible enthusiasm and imagination, loved movies, knew all about them and was very eager and full of energy. Michael was always scurrying about, a bundle of activity."

Reeves did not direct any of Lee's scenes in the film—a low-budget, atmospheric fantasy about a medieval carnival troupe who run afoul of Lee's Count Drago—but he so impressed the film's producer, Paul Maslansky, that Reeves was permitted to add some scenes of his own, mostly involving a heroic dwarf who eventually rescues the leading lady.

"I met Michael in Yugoslavia in 1963, when I was Columbia Pictures' production man-

The movie also quickly became one of the biggest hits in AIP's history, earning—according to Louis M. Heyward, head of AIP's London office in the late '60s—an estimated \$1.5 million (on a \$250,000 budget) during its first run, and \$4 million overall, in the twenty years since its release. Significantly, the film was not destined to be forgotten along with the later Hammer films or other genre titles of the period remembered only by buffs and completists. Eighteen years after Reeves' death, the original, British print of his *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*—sans AIP's tagged-on Poe prologue and retitling—played the Museum of Modern Art's New York retrospective of British films.

Between 1965 and his death early in 1969, Reeves directed

Cinematographer John Coquillon films Hilary Dwyer in *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, which benefits greatly from Coquillon's lush, evocative location camerawork.



ager for *THE LONGSHIPS*," said Maslansky, best known for producing the *POLICE ACADEMY* series. "Michael's mother was a friend of the producer, Irving Allen, and Allen gave him a job as an assistant on the picture. Michael fell in love with a girl during the film and that took him away from the picture."

"Later in 1963, he turned up in Rome with his girlfriend, when I was producing *CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD*, and asked for a job. I hired him as an assistant director. It was 25 years ago, but I remember working with Michael as if it were yesterday. He was enormously talented. He directed all of the coach scenes on the way to the castle, a lot of the fights and the opening of the picture, with the hanging."

*CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD* is decidedly uneven, but several ingredients make it a footnote in genre history: it marked both Reeves' and Donald Sutherland's film debuts (Sutherland plays a dual role, as a buffoonish army sergeant and a hideous witch), it was photographed by Aldo Tonti, who had shot *NIGHTS OF CABIRIA* (1956) for Fellini, and it was the first feature produced by Maslansky. What's more, its casual acceptance of evil as a pervasive force in society foreshadows the later films wholly directed by Reeves.

**P**rior to working for Maslansky on *THE LONGSHIPS*, having just graduated from Britain's Radley School, Reeves eagerly flew to Los Angeles to meet his idol—director Don Siegel (*INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS*). Siegel remembered the event vividly. "Michael showed up at my house, totally unknown, very brash—I think he was about 19—incredibly long curly hair for the time, which was certainly not the mode. He said, 'I think you're the greatest director in the world today,' or something like that. And because we're nuts, we let him come into the house, told him he could go up to the poolhouse, and live there if he wanted to. We didn't know him from a hole in the

**“It was 25 years ago, but I remember working in Rome with Michael as if it were yesterday. He was enormously talented.”**

**— Producer Paul Maslansky —**



Scenes from *CARRION*, Reeves' amateur 8mm horror film, shot at the age of 15. Above: Ian Ogilvy murders Reeves. Inset: The young director, looking sinister, as one of the film's leads.

wall. I knew from his accent that he was well-educated but I had no idea that he was a wealthy young man—*au contraire*—I thought he was really roughing it. I found out much, much later that he was quite wealthy.

"He was a Siegel buff. He knew every film I'd ever done. And I remember I had a 101-degree fever, and Hal Wallis called and asked me if I'd shoot some tests on an Elvis Presley picture, to be called *FUN IN ACAPULCO* [1963]. And there was Michael, so I asked him if he'd like to come down and help out. He said, 'Oh, God, I'd love to.' So I said, 'Great—you can be my dialogue director. It's nothing. You just take the script and go over the lines with the people we're testing. If they make a mistake, you make a note of it and come over to me later and tell me anything that occurs to you.' At the time, although I thought the script was an abomination, I was hoping to get the job, because I needed the bread.

"Michael did that test with me, and then the next thing I hear, he's in England directing a few years later. And he got started [in films] by saying he was my dialogue director, which I thought took a wee bit of guts, and I sort of admired it."

Among the most intriguing elements of Reeves' career is the way it embraced, despite its brevity, nearly every important facet of the mid-to-late '60s European horror cycle. Reeves worked in Italy—a hub of activity following the release of Bava's *BLACK SUNDAY* ('60)—directed Barbara Steele (in *THE SHE BEAST*), directed Boris Karloff in one of his few respectable latterday films (*THE SORCERERS*), and directed AIP's reigning superstar, Vincent Price, in *WITCH-FINDER GENERAL*. Had Reeves worked for Hammer and Amicus, he would have touched all the bases. Even his minimal work on *CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD* was distinctive. Reeves' contributions take the best advantage in

the movie of its medieval setting and such natural locations as the castle and surrounding forest.

Apart from some TV commercials in England, Reeves' next job after *CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD* was again with Maslansky. This time, however, Reeves provided the opportunity himself. "Michael reappeared in 1964 with \$35,000 in cash and an idea for a movie he wanted to make," said Maslansky, who used the money to put together the production of *THE SHE BEAST*.

The film's original title was *VARDELLA* and it was evidently a rewrite of an existing Maslansky treatment. Reeves wrote the final draft himself, and applied a pseudonym, Michael Byron. It was shot in eighteen days outside Rome, with ersatz Italian locations doubling for contemporary Transylvania. A second unit whose main function was to add comedy relief, and pad the movie to feature length (as it stands, it runs only 74 minutes), was directed by Corman alumnus Charles Griffith, of *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS* fame. Reeves was accompanied by his girlfriend, Annabelle Webb (billed in the credits as "set dresser"), who was to play a significant role in his life.

Barbara Steele was the movie's "name" star ("We paid her \$5,000 and worked her 22 hours straight, and she didn't talk to me for fifteen years!" recalled Maslansky), but the actor who received the most screen time was Ian Ogilvy, an old school chum of Reeves', then just beginning his screen career. "The film is quite cheap and crude," recalled Ogilvy, now based in Hollywood. "The crew was paid at the end of the day from a cash box in the back of a truck, for God's sake!—but Michael was able to bring remarkable energy to it."

Ogilvy is the only actor to have appeared in all three of Reeves' features. He traces their relationship back to English prep school days. They even collaborated on a short film, *CARRION*, an arty horror thriller in the *PARANOIAC* vein, with lots of gore

and bizarre camerawork. "We met at the age of fifteen through mutual friends," said Ogilvy. "He was already very much into films, and I wanted to be an actor. He wanted to make a little amateur film, which he'd scripted, and intended to shoot down at his mother's house in Suffolk. So we all went off there for a couple of weeks. We had an 8mm camera. I was the makeup man and star—I think that's why I was the star, because I was able to do the makeup.

"The following year Mike asked me back and we remade it in 16mm, exactly the same script," recalled Ogilvy. "I played the butler. Both versions run about fifteen minutes, in black-and-white. Neither version ever ended up with a soundtrack. Mike got bored with them very soon. It was a simple storyline, but even then you could tell it was very well put together.

"Then I lost track of Mike for a while. It must have been about four or five years before I met up with him again. My agent called from out of the blue and said, 'Do you know somebody called Mike Reeves?' And I said, 'My God, yes, I did, quite a long time ago.' My agent said, 'Well, he's making a film in Italy and he wants you to play the lead. He's prepared to pay you £50 a week—which was very nice—and £9 a week expenses.' That's not easy in Rome, to pay your hotel bill and live on £9 a week. But off I went and we did the film."

There is considerable violence in *THE SHE BEAST* even in the relatively placid scenes between witch Vardella's "death" and her resurrection. When Ogilvy, as a honeymooning husband, discovers a slovenly innkeeper (Mel Welles) spying on him and Steele in their bridal suite, he bolts outside and angrily assaults him. The unwarranted brutality of the act—the husband repeatedly smashing the innkeeper's head against a wall, staining it with blood—implies that the hero is not merely dragged to the innkeeper's primitive level, but, beneath his civilized exterior, is already there.

For the first time, Reeves suggests an idea that was to figure intrinsically in all of his

**“Michael showed up at my house, totally unknown, very brash—I think he was about 19—and because we're nuts, we let him come in.”**

— Director Don Siegel —



Christopher Lee as Count Drago in *CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD* (1963), an Italian horror film on which Reeves directed second unit for Paul Maslansky.

features, building in prominence with each film: aggression and violence are a contaminating force, a contagion that affects everything in the vicinity. The physical representation of it in *THE SHE BEAST* is Vardella herself, a living embodiment of putrescence: in one of the film's most alarming and unexpected images, John Karlson as Von Helsing tugs at the unconscious witch's eyelid, and in full close-up, a worm slithers out of her eye socket.

Reeves' bleak spiritual views in *THE SHE BEAST* were undercut by the film's paltry budget and Griffith's second unit work, consisting of a dim running gag involving some Keystone Kops-type police. The comedy relief seems to have been edited into the movie whenever it is on the verge of becoming suspenseful. Members of the crew, and even Reeves himself (seen in a brief close-up), were pressed into service as costumed extras in the "mob" that drowns Vardella in the film's opening. Reeves found the shooting circumstances so frustrating—at one point, snow in May moved

exteriors indoors—that he couldn't imagine the film would look decent enough to be taken seriously by an audience. As a result, he frequently didn't take it seriously himself. This accounts for some in-jokes—such as the shot of a sickle that has just hacked the innkeeper to pieces being tossed away by Vardella, landing neatly around a hammer!

Steele's limited availability and the lack of money for additional interiors forced Reeves to eliminate his original ending. "The film ends with Barbara Steele brought back from being a witch," said Ogilvy, "sitting in the back of a car, driving away from the terrible lake which she was dragged from and saying, 'I'll be back,' which is supposed to send a little *frisson* of fear down the audience's back. The original ending was a bit more expensive. We were to go back to London, a happily married couple. We're in bed together at night, the moonlight coming through the window, and I turn over and open my eyes and there is, not Barbara Steele, but the 400-year-old

witch who's buried in the sulfur lake come back to life again! It would have been a simple matter to shoot that—just a couple of set-ups, really—but we didn't have the money.

"It suddenly struck us as being a very silly movie," explained Ogilvy, "and maybe the best thing would be to cut our losses and run. That's why you have all those jokes in it. Actually, the film made a lot of money, in its own term."

Even the movie's release title was purportedly a joke. Ogilvy stated that a meeting was held for the purpose of selecting a British release title for the film (then called *SISTER OF SATAN*). Purely as a joke, Reeves proposed, "Why not call it *REVENGE OF THE BLOOD BEAST*?"—a gag homage to AIP's *NIGHT OF THE BLOOD BEAST* (1958). Maslansky thought the title was a marketable one, and it stayed.

*REVENGE OF THE BLOOD BEAST* opened in the U.S. in the summer of 1966, under a slightly more palatable title, *THE SHE BEAST*, released by Europix Consolidated, a distributor specializing in dubbed European programmers. It disappeared from view when Europix folded a few years later, drifted into the public domain, and eventually surfaced on TV—and, more recently, on home video through Gorgon Video/MPI.

**B**ack in England in 1966, Reeves went to work on *THE SORCERERS*, following months of inactivity in which numerous projects were proposed and then abandoned. Although he had reportedly bankrolled a portion of *THE SHE BEAST*, Reeves preferred to take the more professional and conventional route of acquiring outside financing for his film projects. *THE SORCERERS*, adapted from John Burke's novel and produced for Tony Tenser's Tigon Films (a cut-rate follower of Hammer and Amicus) for about £45,000, is Reeves' only completely contemporary story. It is also the first Reeves film that can withstand serious analysis.

Boris Karloff and Catherine Lacey played **THE SORCERERS**, elderly Vaudevillians with a hypnotist act who victimize Ian Ogilvy as the young manager of a small antique shop subject to periodic bouts of depression. The hypnotists use Ogilvy as a guinea pig to test a method of hypnotizing and controlling subjects from a distance, the product of a lifetime of research.

**THE SORCERERS**, like **WITCHFINDER GENERAL** after it, is told from the point of view of the audience, not one of the film's characters. Only the audience is privy to the details necessary for a full understanding of the entire plot. And the final shot of the film—the hypnotists incinerated in their flat following the explosion of Ogilvy's car—is a gruesome event not witnessed by anyone but the audience. As critics Wood and Pirie correctly observed, **THE SORCERERS** is as much about the voyeuristic experience of seeing violent films as about the action that occurs onscreen.

**THE SORCERERS** is part science fiction, part suspense thriller. Its second half, in which Ogilvy eludes detection and capture for several crimes (including an after-hours robbery) is heavily influenced by Siegel's crime films, and by **INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS**. Reeves also is fascinated by the subliminal urges that exist just below the surface in his characters. For the film's purposes, these are the suppressed emotions that truly control one's actions. Reeves makes it inarguably clear that the perversity that



Barbara Steele (l) as the reincarnated witch of **THE SHE BEAST**, Reeves's 1966 directorial debut. Right: The gag British title.



simmers within Karloff's wife, who manipulates Ogilvy for her own vicarious pleasure, is mirrored by a destructive anger within Ogilvy himself. They are kindred spirits—a subtle jab at the old cliché that a hypnotist cannot force a subject to do something that is against his moral standards. Ogilvy is perfectly capable of doing whatever horrendous thing the hypnotist suggests.

Reeves had used the concept of sexual villainy in **THE SHE BEAST**—in the lecherous innkeeper played by Mel Welles—but **THE SORCERERS** is his first film in which a principal character derives sexual gratification from an act of violence. "It's the only film of Mike's which begs a lot of

questions which needn't be answered," said Ogilvy, "as to the kind of sensations the old lady might have been enjoying."

Ogilvy admitted that the theme of aberrant sexuality, which would become a major component of **WITCHFINDER GENERAL**, was a definite preoccupation of the young director. But Ogilvy claimed never to have discussed the subject with Reeves. (Ogilvy also conceded the significance of Reeves' naming **THE SORCERERS**' protagonist "Michael," after himself.) Still, the film's sexual underpinning was one of several areas where Reeves met with censorship opposition in England. But his warm relationship with John Trevelyan, then the chief British film censor, helped forestall major difficulties.

"Those were early days," recalled Ogilvy. "We still had heavy censorship. Trevelyan was in fact a distant cousin of Mike's, and they liked each other very much. He didn't believe our low budgets when we brought him the pictures for censorship purposes. Trevelyan took his job very seriously, and he always had enormous sympathy with Mike. He always said, 'I know what you're trying to do, but we can't quite get away with that, we've got to do this.' And Mike would say, 'OK, John, if you

insist.' Trevelyan was always regarded as being very unbending, but he would allow Mike to get away with just a bit more, because he knew Mike was very serious about what he was doing."

**THE SORCERERS** is a far better film than **THE SHE BEAST**, but it is still stronger in concept than in execution. Some glaring concessions to commercial interests—such as scenes set in a disco with irritatingly shrill music, apparently imposed by the producers—and an obviously low budget that prevented special effects, dilute the movie's power. And all of the supporting performances, excluding Susan George as a pouty ex-girlfriend who is Ogilvy's first victim—are inadequate.

**THE SORCERERS** is also, along with Peter Bogdanovich's **TARGETS** (1968), one of Boris Karloff's last good films. Karloff himself was delighted with the movie. "Karloff was lovely," Ogilvy remembered. "Karloff really liked Mike, and he liked his part. Catherine [Lacey] hated her part, and it worried her and depressed her. She didn't really like having to do these things at all. But Boris rather liked his part, because his was an enormously sympathetic old boy. And he didn't have to wear tons of makeup, apart

Reeves directs horror film legend Boris Karloff in **THE SORCERERS** (1987).



from at the end. He was reasonably comfortable and Mike got him enthusiastic.

"Karloff was a marvelous old man," recalled Ogilvy. "He was pretty ill at the time. He had great troubles with his leg and had a metal brace on it. A couple of days after we started shooting, the sound men came up to Mike and said, 'We're going to have to ask Mr. Karloff to oil his leg, as we're picking up a squeak from it. Mike asked Boris to do a lot of tiring things, like falling on the ground and crawling across floors, and he really wasn't up to it, but he never complained."

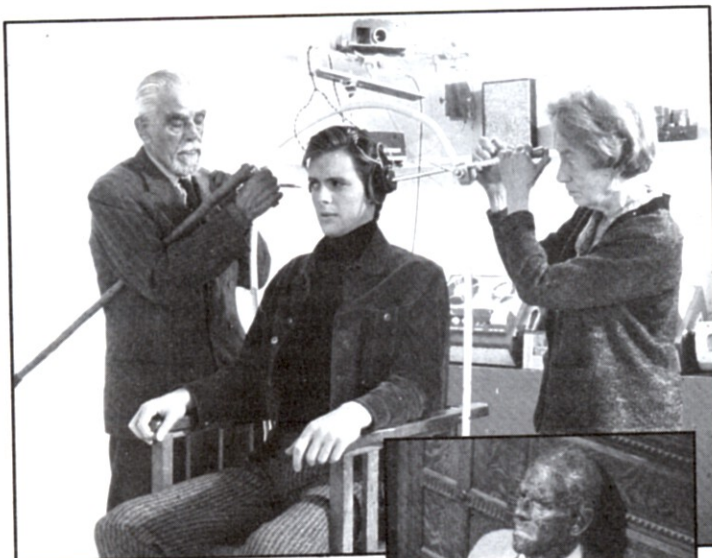
"And after all, *THE SORCERERS* played the Carlton Theatre in [London's] Haymarket [district] and Boris' reaction to that was, 'My God—I haven't had a film of mine play the West End for thirteen years! All of a sudden this tiny little £45,000 film is playing in the West End!' Well, it was an accident of fate, an unexpected opening that they hastily scheduled *THE SORCERERS* into, but Boris was awfully pleased about that."

**B**ookings in the U.S. for *THE SORCERERS* were not so elegant. Picked up for distribution in 1967 by Allied Artists, the movie received a release similar to that accorded *THE SHE BEAST*—though it sometimes was packed off as the bottom of a one-week double bill, in support of obscure exploitation pictures acquired by Allied. In 1972, Allied resurrected *THE SORCERERS* for urban and drive-in double features with Peter Collinson's new film, *FRIGHT* (with, by a coincidence, Susan George in a lead role this time). *THE SORCERERS* received better exposure the second time around, and, of course, permitted admirers of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*—which by then had been discovered by *cinéastes*—a chance to see the movie which laid the groundwork for the ideas that *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* would express so forcefully.

With international distribution to help it, *THE SORCERERS* earned a healthy profit, and Tenser was able to raise

**“After we started shooting, the sound men came up to Mike and said, ‘We’re going to have to ask Mr. Karloff to oil his leg.’”**

**— Actor Ian Ogilvy —**



Ian Ogilvy as the guinea pig for *THE SORCERERS*, vaudeville hypnotists Boris Karloff and Catherine Lacey, for Reeves a look at vicarious sexual pleasure. Inset: Karloff incinerated.



£50,000 to finance a new Reeves project, *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, planned as a loose adaptation of Ronald Bassett's historical account of England's infamous 17th century witchhunter, Matthew Hopkins. The assuredness of Reeves' direction and his keen awareness of the film's premise, its sense of place, time and purpose—augmented by Johnny Coquillon's superb, evocative location photography—underscore how completely Reeves had learned his craft in barely three years.

(Ironically, Coquillon—whose contribution to *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* rivals that of Reeves himself in importance—died in a nearly identical manner almost twenty years later. After shooting a few more movies for AIP, Coquillon achieved fame as cinematographer for Sam Peckinpah. In late 1987, Coquillon was found dead in his home in Maidenhead, outside London, of a drug and alcohol overdose, shortly after returning from a film location in

Africa. It was an open verdict by the coroner, who did not rule it a suicide.)

"Tigon acquired the book for Michael purely so we could use that great title *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*," revealed Philip Waddilove, a former BBC radio and record producer who served as *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*'s line producer. Waddilove contributed the final £5,000 to Tenser's budget in return for associate producer billing. Waddilove ended up as one of three credited producers of the film, with ten percent of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*'s non-U.S. profits—the portion controlled by Tenser and Tigon, not AIP, which controls the U.S. rights in perpetuity.

Waddilove and Reeves were introduced by Waddilove's then-fiancee—now wife, Susan—who was a secretary at the William Morris Agency in Rome. Waddilove's fiancee mentioned to Reeves and Annabelle Webb—the director's fiancee—that her husband-to-be had just started a

company that secured locations for film companies. Waddilove joined *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* as location scout and organizer for the production.

In May 1967, Waddilove helped Reeves, then 23, on a rewrite of the screenplay. Reeves had written the original draft of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* with Tom Baker—not the actor of *DR. WHO*, but according to Ogilvy, a young writer and friend of Reeves' who was able to encourage the director to sit down and endure the tedious process of committing ideas to paper. Baker co-authored both *THE SORCERERS* and *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, but Waddilove and Ogilvy insist Baker contributed little to the final drafts of the scripts, and never appeared on the set, where many of the changes in structure and characterization were implemented.

Although it is difficult to imagine *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* today without Vincent Price, he was not Reeves' first choice. "Michael had got Donald Pleasence interested in the script," said Waddilove. "Tony [Tenser] had raised some money, and I was dispatched to take some location stills in East Anglia. Tony showed those photographs to American-International and that helped induce them to put up the completion funds. The final budget was £83,000. AIP put in all of £32,000 for their half-interest in the picture, and part of the deal was that we use Vincent [Price]. He was under contract to AIP. Vincent's salary came out of AIP's contribution, so they got quite a deal. In fact, I think they only paid Vincent £12,000, which would have lowered their contribution below what's in the official contracts. That was the end of Donald Pleasence being in the picture. Michael very nearly walked off the picture at that point."

*WITCHFINDER GENERAL* was scheduled to begin shooting on September 18, 1967. Waddilove was sent to London's Heathrow Airport a few days earlier, to greet Vincent Price, arriving by plane

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# WITCHFINDER GENERAL

*Harnessing an unruly star in the service of his lyrical horror rhapsody marked Reeves as a leading auteur of the genre.*

*By Bill Kelley*

Despite a larger budget at £82,000, the biggest of his career, Michael Reeves was beset by more technical and logistical problems on *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* than had been posed by any of his other movies. On the first day of shooting, Vincent Price, as the titular witch hunter, mounted the handsome white horse that had been hired for his role as witch hunter Matthew Hopkins—and was promptly thrown from it. The actor was sent back to his hotel, assuring

*Color photographs from  
WITCHFINDER GENERAL  
by Philip Waddilove*

Vincent Price, Reeves' reluctant star, thrown from his horse on the first day.



the company he would be fine after a day's rest. Price returned the next day, stiff and achy but eager to begin work.

Toward the end of shooting, a strike was called when the British technicians union learned the company was not hiring a large enough crew. An extra man was hired and, two days later everyone resumed working. And, on two occasions, Reeves found himself short of actors. Producer Philip Waddilove replaced an absent actor as a Roundhead officer during Patrick Wy-mark's one-day cameo on the picture as Cromwell—Waddilove is seated closest to the camera and says, "The conflict . . . will go down as a triumph of your strategy." And wife Susi Waddilove was forced to don a ragged dress, filthy wig and black out her teeth in order to play one of the women in the animal's pen during the witch-burning sequence, because Reeves felt there were not enough women in the shot.

Reeves' enthusiasm for the project was infectious, and bouyed the crew. Apart from his intermittent needling of Price, Reeves, remembered friend and actor Ian Ogilvy, was "friendly, cooperative and easy on the set. He was able to inject into even the most hardened, toe-the-line union boy an enthusiasm which they hadn't had since they made their first movie. It was extraordinary seeing these old fellows



Filming the pre-credits sequence, as a village mob drags a witch, Hira Talfrey (inset) to the gibbet, an elaborate dolly shot for a low-budget effort, set up by Reeves and cameraman John Coquillon.



suddenly really enjoying themselves.

"And Mike didn't ingratiate himself in any way," Ogilvy continued. "He always stuck to his decisions. Nobody ever bullied him around. It would really give him a big kick to say to an actor he admired, 'I think it's a bit slow—could we speed it up a bit?' He didn't do that very much—like Don Siegel, who's always professed not to direct his actors, merely to cast the right ones in the right roles and let them get on with it. This was Mike's philosophy."

Reeves' casting for *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* was impeccable, from the stars down to the most fleetingly glimpsed bit player. Ogilvy is perfect as Marshall, the dashing hero—tall, confident and athletic. Hopkins and his confederate Stearne, who cut a swath through the countryside, would never seem as chilling as they do without the icy performances of Price and Robert Russell. Hilary Dwyer as Sara, Ogilvy's love—her auburn hair brushed back, her delicate skin untouched by makeup—is the perfect embodiment of healthy, peasant beauty. Even Tony Selby as Salter—the sullen young villager who summons Hopkins to Brandeston—conveys more than is written into his character, suggesting a bitter resentment against Marshall for being Sara's lover.

The best performance in the film is arguably Russell's portrayal of Stearne—although Ogilvy and Waddilove insist that Russell's voice was too thin and was dubbed by another actor, who anonymously provided Stearne's gravelly delivery. (However, Russell appeared in a minor role as a comic heavy the following year in Bud Yorkin's *INSPECTOR CLOUSEAU*, starring Alan Arkin, and his voice is exactly the same as it was in *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*—which suggests that whoever dubbed his voice in Reeves' film must have followed him from picture to picture.) Nonetheless, said Ogilvy, "I absolutely agree with you. Robert was wonderful. It's very tough to play a character like that without going over the top. He's really effective."

**"He had four inches of specially smelly water put in as though it made a difference. For him it did. He had a great belief in realism."**

*- Actor Rupert Davies -*



Reeves in motion (f.g.) directing the filming of a scene cut from the pre-credits sequence in which Hopkins (Vincent Price) gets his pay-off (inset).



One of the actors most impressed with Reeves was the late Rupert Davies, who played Sara's elderly cleric uncle. Davies died in 1976, but was interviewed in 1975 on the set of Peter Walker's *FRIGHTMARE*. "He was very good, but very exacting and very exhausting," said Davies of Reeves. "He had a great belief in realism. I'm all for that myself, but I thought in some way he carried it a bit far. Like in many shots, where a double would've been used in most films, he wanted the actual actor, even if the camera was on the back of his neck or he was too far away to be recognizable."

"For instance," Davies continued, "I get dragged through the gravel, drowned in the moat, and hung on the tree, all wet, straight from the moat—and before that, I had spikes stuck in the moles on my back, screaming ad lib for hours on end—I believe the censor cut about nine of those stabs and

just left a flash in.

"And then I was in a dungeon cell in the town, chained to the wall, blood everywhere. And he had four inches of specially smelly water put in as though it made a difference. But it did something for him, I think. Then, when the crew was finally ready, and the camera was pointing through the bars of the dungeon, I heard a voice say, 'Right—put the rats in.' Nobody told me anything about rats! They had a rat fancier and he put in three rats. They started crawling up me. Mike was saying, 'Don't move, Rupert. Don't move. Wait till that one starts nibbling your jaw, then you might move your head a little.' I said, 'I might, yeah!' The continuity girl who was sitting there with her knees through the bars and her work sheet shrieked and flew out."

"It was all that kind of thing," continued Davies. "When I was hung on that tree, it really was straight after the moat-dunking scene and we

really were wet. We had to go shivering into that house which had the moat around it and change into the harness, put the wet clothes on again, then go out and do this stuff in the evening gloaming.

"Michael had all this absolute realism going on the whole time," said Davies, his voice filled with admiration. "Very exacting, very impressive."

Waddilove noted that every time he sees *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* he is amazed by the shots of Davies and the women hanging from the tree. "I don't know how Johnny Coquillon got that on film," he said, "because it wasn't 'magic hour' at all, it was well after dusk. But he got it lit in a matter of minutes and shot it, and it's really chilling to look at."

**A**

According to Ogilvy, Reeves regarded *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* as "a western. He always called it that, a chase film; one man on a horse chasing another man on a horse." The observation is significant in that Reeves' film probably makes the most creative use of landscape since the westerns (*THE MAN FROM LARAMIE*, *MAN OF THE WEST*, *THE NAKED SPUR*) directed by Anthony Mann in the '50s. To a great degree, this was a result of the locations discovered by producer Philip Waddilove and utilized so brilliantly by Reeves and cinematographer John Coquillon. The picturesque rolling vistas glimpsed in the chase scenes on horseback were in fact a game preserve that Waddilove, through connections in the government, was able to lease for the production.

The Lavenham Square, site of the witchburning—which Reeves wisely saved as an attention-grabber in the third act—was the real Lavenham Square itself. For the witchburning sequence, the crew lowered TV antennas and telephone wires, and Waddilove rented a cherrypicker from a local utility company for £10, because the unit couldn't afford a camera crane,

Other locations were Orford Castle, on the coast of East Anglia, which is operated by



the National Trust (Britain's counterpart to the U.S. National Parks Service), the Dunwich seacoast in East Suffolk (for the scene in which Ogilvy and his cohorts interview a fisherman), Langley Park outside London (for the scene in which the witchfinder's henchman kills two soldiers and escapes capture) and a location recognizable to Hammer fans, Black Park—the film's only familiar backdrop, which was used for the tracking shot of the soldiers, and their ambush, immediately after the opening credits.

The production also leased two abandoned aircraft hangars outside St. Edmonds for the bargain rate of £1,500 a month, and converted them to studio space for the interiors. The cost-saving measure was cheaper than using a studio, but much of the dialogue for the interiors had to be re-recorded later, because the tin roofs of the hangars caused an echo. Nonetheless, it saved a fortune compared to what conventional studio space would have cost.

Another parallel between Reeves and Anthony Mann is their comparable notion about the use of violence. In both directors' films, it is seen as a sickening contagion. Reeves was determined not to make violence seem like a viable option, or a healthy outlet. "Mike didn't believe, as John Wayne believed, that a saloon brawl is okay, and everybody can bash each other and hurl each other through windows, and nobody seriously gets hurt," explained Ogilvy. "Mike said this philosophy is very



Price on horseback as Witchfinder Matthew Hopkins, with confederate Stearne, played by Robert Russell (below). Reeves saw the film as a kind of transplanted western, using the lush English countryside and a sweeping score by Paul Ferris.

wrong. He said, 'This will surely teach kids they can go into a place and start hitting people, and think they're not actually hurting anyone. I think if you hit somebody in a film, you should see the knuckles break and the teeth fly out and the blood spurt and somebody possibly getting a broken jaw before he leaves—just once. This idea of banging away at people's chins for hours is ludicrous. It's inclined to make violence seem rather jolly.'

"Mike always believed violence should be seen to be horrible," said Ogilvy, "to put people off, not to glorify it.

"And any kind of historical bits and pieces," Ogilvy continued, "were enrichment to the narrative, in order to make what is essentially an exploita-



tion-type movie, with an X-certificate and Vincent Price and blood here and there and maybe a naked girl—which is, after all, what Mike had to do—an attempt to make it a little less . . . well, considerably less run-of-the-mill.

"I regard it as a very important and splendid film."

WITCHFINDER GENERAL moves with the sweep and lushness of a medieval ballad and its devotion of equal screen attention to the authentic historical setting and the horrific elements intensifies its narrative power. Its beautiful, fully orchestrated score by Paul Ferris draws every last ounce of atmosphere from Reeves' colorful pastoral canvas, underscoring the encounters with shepherds and tradesmen who make their living on the isolated plains and hills of England. The importance of Ferris' score would become painfully evident eighteen years later—

when it was removed! In a shocking transgression that makes the colorization movement seem like a harmless bit of whimsy by comparison, Ferris' majestic score was wiped from all American prints—both those in TV syndication and available on HBO Home Video—in 1986, and replaced by a tinny, barren synthesizer score composed by a young Los Angeles composer, Kendall Schmidt, who rescored several other AIP titles during the same period.

Ferris, who had provided the meager score for Reeves' THE SORCERERS as well, also played a small acting role in WITCHFINDER GENERAL, as the vengeful husband shot by Hopkins in the movie's penultimate scene. As an inside joke, the name used for his acting debut was "Morris Jar," a variation on the veteran composer Maurice Jarre (LAWRENCE OF ARABIA).

Low-budget dolly, filming Stearne's capture by soldiers in Cromwell's army—shot from the vantage of a camera van, pushed by members of the production crew.





Low-budget crane shot: producer Philip Waddilove rented a cherry picker for Reeves to film the burning of a witch in the Lavenham town square. Inset: On the ground, preparing witch Maggie Kimberly for her shot with the flames.

Reeves, who celebrated his 24th birthday in October, during the production of *WITCH-FINDER GENERAL*, wrapped the film on Nov. 13, 1967 and immediately began editing. In the spring of 1968, Reeves turned his cut of *WITCH-FINDER GENERAL* over to AIP. Predictably, AIP was delighted with the film. Ogilvy recalled, "They said, 'My God! We've got an art movie on our hands, but an exploitable art movie!'"

But with Price as its star, AIP felt the film could be most profitably marketed as an extension of the by-then de-

funct Poe cycle. In one of the more ludicrous maneuvers in the distributor's history, AIP changed the film's title to *THE CONQUEROR WORM* for its U.S. release. AIP also brought Price in to recite, at the beginning and end of the film, a few lines from the classic poem, Poe's celebration of mankind's frail, futile attempts to survive a world that leads only to the grave. Reeves, at first upset by AIP's meddling, soon shrugged and told Ogilvy, "Oh, what the hell. It's still our movie. They haven't changed that."

AIP's saturation distribution of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* in the U.S. under the spurious Poe title gave it the best exposure of any Reeves film. AIP boss Samuel Z. Arkoff loved the movie but not its title. "That was a best-selling book in the U.K.," explained Arkoff, "but who the hell in America cared about that, or knew about Cromwell and the rest of it? I came up with the new title.

"We found a way to please both worlds," he said. "Poe went very well with it, didn't it? And it was very successful. We'd had Vincent [Price] under contract for a number of years for horror films, and he was always a very good actor and a powerful presence. But Michael Reeves brought out some element in Vincent that hadn't been seen in a long time. Vincent was more savage in that picture. Michael really brought out the balls in him.

"I was surprised how terrifying Vincent was in that," said Arkoff. "I hadn't expected it." □

Price and Robert Russell as Stearne rehearse the torture and moat dunking of the women accused of witchcraft at Brandeston, one of the film's authentic locations.



Unsettling as the tortures and executions of the witches are—replete with such images as glassy-eyed villagers staring at the horrible deaths, and toddlers baking potatoes in the leftover embers of the pyres—they pale alongside the climax. Terrifying as it is, nothing in the film prepares audiences for the sudden horror of Marshall hacking Hopkins to death and then going mad himself. What begins as an act of gratifying retribution ends in revulsion, shame and terror. Reeves implicates the audience fully in all three emotions, fulfilling the promise of the attitudes he expressed in *THE SORCERERS* two years before.

(Curiously, the original ending to the film was to have been quite different. Ogilvy reported that Hopkins and Stearne were to have run afoul of a band of gypsies midway through the movie. At the end, after Marshall and Sara escape unharmed, the gypsies—who live

outside the normal structure of society—return and secretly slaughter the witchfinders, then calmly move on to the next district. The ending was abandoned for financial reasons, and as shooting commenced, Reeves realized that the film's new ending was a substantial improvement.)

Reeves managed to restrain censor John Trevelyan from cutting eleven minutes out of the release print. According to Waddilove, the censor eliminated seven minutes (other sources place the count at four minutes), primarily from the torturing of Davies, the Lavenham witchburning ("He cut a lot of that," recalled Waddilove) and the climactic attack on Price. Reeves told Trevelyan and Ogilvy that he thought the cuts actually improved the film, because some of the mayhem, while accurate, was so protracted and sadistic that it "stopped the show."

from Los Angeles. "I remember Vincent gliding majestically down the escalator at Heathrow," recalled Waddilove, "saying, 'Take me to your goddamn young genius.' Vincent knew Michael didn't want him in the picture—a fact Michael, unfortunately, did not conceal from him."

"I had a lot of difficulty with Michael Reeves," Price recalled. "He did not want me in the picture. I did it to fulfill an obligation. I had read the script and was terribly excited and really interested in this young fellow, but he was a man who really did not know how to handle actors. There are certain directors who affect this kind of disinterest in actors and think that it's a director's medium. We did not get along at all. I realized only after I saw the finished film how talented he was."

By the time shooting began, Waddilove had found himself functioning as line producer on the film. "As the pre-production went on, my contribution enlarged and I noticed Michael was addressing me as 'producer,'" said Waddilove. "I said, 'What's this about producer?' Michael said, 'Well, you are. Tony [Tenser] doesn't understand the need for a unit, he doesn't understand the filmmaking process, he's a financier—which, frankly, was true. I tried to get Tony to understand that we needed a production unit, to shoot the film, or we'd never get it completed. Then, another film, *THE SKI BUM*, fell apart, and we picked up their unit, which was a lucky break or our film might not have been made."

**A**rnold L. Miller, billed as executive producer of *THE SORCERERS* and producer of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* was actually a boyhood friend of Tenser's. Louis M. "Deke" Heyward received a producer credit as AIP's representative in London. According to Waddilove, Heyward appeared at the location only once, when some nude scenes—Heyward's sole contribution to the screenplay—for the foreign markets were shot in a tavern set. AIP chief Samuel Z.

**“I remember Vincent gliding majestically down the escalator at Heathrow airport, saying ‘Take me to your goddamn young genius!’”**

— Producer Philip Waddilove —



Producer Philip Waddilove (r), pressed into service as an actor for a scene as a Roundhead Officer during Patrick Wymark's one-day cameo as Oliver Cromwell.

Arkoff visited the production only once, in Lavenham, for the spectacular witchburning sequence.

A notation on the credits, "Additional Scenes by Louis M. Heyward," is explained by Ogilvy: "That was a joke entirely designed by Michael. When you see the words 'additional dialogue,' or 'additional scenes by,' to Mike it always meant some prick of a producer putting his oar in and messing up what the director had done. Deke Heyward said, 'Let's have a scene here, and a scene here,' and Mike, because he wasn't looking to make trouble, said, 'OK, Deke, we'll shoot the scenes.' We shot them and put in 'Additional Scenes by Louis M. Heyward,' which the film industry would recognize as a dig by the director at the producer in question." Heyward's nude scenes, missing from the film's theatrical release, have been inserted into the videotape version released by HBO.

Reeves supposedly resented the fact that so much of his budget went to pay Price's salary, but according to Ogilvy, neither that nor a disinterest in

actors accounted for his rift with Price. "Vincent was very difficult on the film," said Ogilvy. "He said he'd given up cigarettes at the time, which had something to do with it. But he resented bitterly this young man, whom he'd never heard of, telling him not to roll his eyes, not to do the old Vincent Price grandiose performance."

Price responded, "Michael Reeves could not communicate with actors. He would stop me and say, 'Don't move your head like that.' And I would say, 'Like what? What do you mean?' He'd say, 'There—you're doing it again. Don't do that.' Well, afterward, I realized what he wanted was a low-key, very laid-back, menacing performance. He did get it, but I was fighting with him almost every step of the way. Had I known what he wanted, I could have cooperated."

Waddilove noted that Price was so put off by Reeves that he even refused to attend dailies for the first week. "We all said, 'Vincent, you really must go—this is marvelous stuff,'" remembered Waddilove, "and finally he crept in one day,

looked at the screen and sniffed, 'Ohh, well . . .'"

Reeves had anticipated a hostile reaction to the violence in *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, but was unprepared for the assault that British critics levelled against it. Not since the early Hammer films had a movie been so vehemently attacked. "I know Alan Bennett in *The Listener* attacked it tremendously," Ogilvy remembered. "He used the curious phrase, 'When I see violence, I want it to be accompanied by a hearty bellylaugh,' which I didn't understand. Neither did Mike."

Reeves was moved to write letters to some of the more prominent newspapers whose critics had taken him to task. In one of these, he declared, "Violence is horrible, degrading and sordid. It should be presented as such—and the more people it shocks into sickened recognition of these facts the better."

Price did not participate in the organized defense of the film. He and Reeves had not parted friends. In fact, by the last night of shooting—when Price's death was shot at 1 a.m. in Orford Castle—Reeves had worked Price nearly 36 hours straight.

Price reportedly had gone out to dinner and returned slightly tipsy. "Michael was furious," recalled Waddilove. "He said to me, 'Look at him! He's drunk!' I said, 'Michael, no, he's not.' And Michael said, 'Don't tell me! Look at him! He's drunk!' He was really rough on Vincent. I took Vincent up the stairs as Michael was rehearsing the others and said, 'Vincent, I'm sorry, I don't know what Michael is doing.' And he said, 'Oh, that's all right, old boy.'"

Waddilove continued: "Ian [Ogilvy] had the ax and Michael went up to him and said 'Really let him have it.' I remember the wardrobe girls kept running up, stuffing more foam rubber padding under Vincent's cloak, to protect him from the ax blows."

Price returned home to Los Angeles and tried to forget the experience. "They didn't part friends at all," said Ogilvy, "but months later, when Vincent saw the movie in Los

Angeles, he wrote Mike a ten-page letter. He said, "You were right. You've made me give one of the best performances of my horror movie career."

Price recalled, "I sat down and wrote him a letter and said, 'I think you've done a brilliant job. It's a wonderful film.' And he wrote me back, saying, 'I knew you would think so.' He was a strange young man, and he would always have to end up any conversation saying, 'And God bless your soul.'" (The closing line in *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, delivered by Marshall's best friend Trooper Swallow [Nicky Henson], in a setting of utter despair, is "May God have mercy on us all.")

As *THE CONQUEROR WORM* the film raked in a fortune—helped, during its brief run, by good word-of-mouth. AIP took an interest in Reeves, and offered him other projects to consider. He was one of several directors who did preliminary work—including some location hunting—on the troubled production of *DE SADE*, but he dropped out because he insisted upon rewriting Richard Matheson's screenplay. Reeves also discussed the script of *THE OBLONG BOX*—a film set to star Vincent Price (again) and Christopher Lee—with its writer, Christopher Wicking.

However, Reeves' pet project was an adaptation of a short British novel published in 1968, *All the Little Animals*, by Walker Hamilton. While not nominally a horror story, Hamilton's book—which explores the friendship between a boy and an old man who patrols London roadways in pre-dawn hours, removing dead animals struck by cars the night before—possessed a plot which obviously was compatible with Reeves' taste for the bizarre. Reeves and Philip Mackie, head of operations for the newly formed Granada Films, began scouting locations while Reeves prepared a treatment. British character actor Arthur Lowe (*THE RULING CLASS*, *O'LUCKY MAN!*) had agreed to play the lead.

Another project might have liberated Reeves from low-budget horror films entirely.

**"I think he was terribly nervous getting up to bat, as anyone who's talented is. It's only the pods and peasants who aren't afraid."**

**- Director Don Siegel -**



Composer Paul Ferris, listed in the credits as Morris Jar, as the vengeful husband who spots Hopkins and Stearne in the Lavenham town square at the end.

Columbia Pictures was planning an adaptation of Janice Elliott's successful novel *THE BUTTERCUP CHAIN*—a drama about incestuous cousins, to be shot in London, Spain and Sweden—with Waddilove and his partner John Whitney producing. To Waddilove's dismay, he and Whitney could not persuade Columbia to sign Reeves as director. "John and I fought with Columbia for months," said Waddilove, "but they said, 'Michael's all right for a \$1 million picture but not a \$2 million picture,' and Michael finally walked. He said, 'Philip, you won't get the movie made at all if you keep fighting with them about me.' Michael was terribly depressed about losing that."

Despite this disappointment, Reeves no longer had to worry about finding work as a director—although, admittedly, most of the interest in him came from AIP. His months of relative inactivity were accompanied by bouts of depression. Reeves and Annabelle Webb, who had been with him since the days in Italy shooting the Maslansky films,

announced and then broke off their engagement twice. Finally, shortly before *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* began shooting, they broke up for good.

"But Michael still cared a great deal about Annabelle," said Waddilove. "And when she was injured in a car accident in London during production of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL*, he drove all night to visit her in hospital and then get back to the location. He couldn't have gotten more than a couple of hours sleep."

Medication was prescribed, and at one point, Reeves was hospitalized for anxiety and depression. Gordon Hessler, who had been associate producer of *ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS* on American television, was hired by AIP to produce *DE SADE*, the company's biggest film to date, and had meetings with Reeves in West Germany. Hessler said Reeves was "mentally sick . . . He was taking shock treatments at the time." Reeves soon backed out of the project.

Hessler was removed from *DE SADE* when Cy Endfield took over as director. Not long after, Hessler was assigned to

produce *THE OBLONG BOX*, which AIP intended to have Reeves direct in Ireland from a screenplay—not written by Reeves—which Hessler described as "dreadful . . . absolutely appalling." By the time Hessler met Reeves in Ireland, he was "severely sick," said Hessler, who was alarmed at his young colleague's physical and emotional state. Reeves, deeply distressed at the poor quality of *THE OBLONG BOX* screenplay, soon bowed out of that project as well, according to Hessler, who worked with Christopher Wicking on a new script and took over the direction himself. At no time did Reeves actually direct any of the film.

**R**eeves experienced increasingly volatile highs and lows. When his mood was up he often invited friends (including Ogilvy and his wife) to his home for evening film showings. When he was down, he kept to himself, and was disconsolate and introspective. "These bouts of depression were only toward the end," said Ogilvy. "He got into a lot of introspective, 'meaning of life' type thinking. Mike was rather a downbeat character in a way. He had a curious life, about the money side of it, you know. He became very rich when he was fifteen and it came as quite a blow. His father had died and he and his mother inherited a lot of money."

"The fact that he was able to live for eighteen months without doing anything but trying to get a movie going was, in a sense, an advantage," added Ogilvy. "He didn't have to go out and get another job. But I think it's very lucky, because I don't think he'd have gotten those three pictures off the ground. Mike was directing *REVENGE OF THE BLOOD BEAST* when he was 21. For an untried, untested nobody to do that, it took some doing to get it together."

Although Siegel saw Reeves infrequently after their first meeting in 1963 he maintained a correspondence with him, and was aware of his fragile mood. "Directing is very frightening, and you physically

have to be in excellent health," said Siegel. "It's very demanding. I don't think Michael was well, with all his bouts of depression, either through drugs or whatever. I knew he took drugs, I don't know to what degree. I know he smoked pot—and why not? I know he'd had pneumonia."

Waddilove disputed that: "I spent a lot of time with Michael and I never saw him smoke pot. He didn't like it. He was taking anti-depressants at the time of *WITCHFINDER GENERAL* and immediately after, and he was sometimes careless about the dosages he took. He also drank, although not to excess, but you're not supposed to drink when you take anti-depressants."

Observed Siegel, "I think he was just terribly nervous about getting up to bat, as any person who's talented is. It's only the pods and the peasants who get up there and aren't afraid. I'm always very nervous. I always think each picture I'm going to do is the last one."

"That poor boy!" summed up Price. "I was told after he died that he was uninsurable. AIP wanted him to direct *THE OBLONG BOX* but they assigned it to another director [Hessler] because they didn't think Michael Reeves would finish it. He had such a bright future."

Michael Leith Reeves was found dead in the sitting room of his flat at 16 Cadogan Place, London, on February 11, 1969. He was clad in his pajamas and was found by his longtime housekeeper, who had shown up two hours late for work that morning. "The official ver-

**LEAVE THE CHILDREN HOME!**  
**...AND IF YOU ARE SQUEAMISH**  
**STAY HOME WITH THEM!**

A crawling shape intrude!  
 A blood-red thing that writhes from out The scenic solitude!  
 It writhes! - it writhes! - with mortal pangs!  
 EDGAR ALLAN POE

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S  
**THE CONQUEROR WORM**  
 AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL COLOR

TONY TENSER presents  
**VINCENT PRICE**  
**IAN OGILVY RUPERT DAVIES**  
**WILFRID BRAMBELL**

**WITCHFINDER GENERAL**

WITH **PATRICK WYMARK**  
 AS CROMWELL

AND INTRODUCING **HILARY DWYER**

AIP slapped Reeves' film with a new title in the U.S. (l), selling it as part of their Poe series, with a voice-over poetry recitation by Price. Said AIP chief Sam Arkoff, "Who the hell in America had heard of Cromwell!" Right: The British ad art.

dict," recalled Ogilvy, "was an accidental overdose of barbiturates, combined with alcohol. I don't know whether the amount of barbiturates taken were in themselves enough. I doubt it."

"Michael used to drink a lot," Ogilvy continued, "and he was very careless. When I say drink a lot, I don't mean he was a drunk, but he used to be careless about his drinking. I personally feel he came home a bit pissed one night and threw a handful of pills down without realizing it. I mean, he was in his pajamas and everything. Really, I think that's all it was."

Noted Waddilove, "Michael had these liquid sleeping drops, and he never measured anything. It was a tragic accident, but not a suicide."

Rupert Davies agreed with Ogilvy and Waddilove. "I believe he had a big upset going on with his girlfriend at the time," said Davies, "and some people think he did it deliberately because of that. Personally, I think he had far too much to live for going for him. He was a vague sort of chap, probably would not remember taking his sleeping pills, and took another handful."

Added Waddilove, "Michael was too involved with motion pictures to be concerned with deep personal relationships. I believe he was also too ambitious in his movie-making to take his own life." Waddilove was in Stockholm scouting locations for *THE BUTTERCUP CHAIN*—eventually directed by Robert Ellis Miller—when Reeves died. Ironically, the film that Reeves so eagerly wanted to direct was an enormous boxoffice and critical failure.

Don Siegel was in Mexico, directing Clint Eastwood and Shirley MacLaine in *TWO MULES FOR SISTER SARA* when he learned of Reeves' death. "I think he committed suicide," Siegel contended. "I couldn't figure out why. I couldn't understand why a young man who had achieved very quick recognition would do that. I guess in a fit of depression, he just made the

decision."

Heyward, interviewed in 1981, said he was visited by Reeves at the London offices of AIP the day before he died. Reeves was sad and uncommunicative, and sat in a corner, saying nothing, according to Heyward. "We weren't close, but I felt like a father watching his son and unable to do anything about the state he was in," said Heyward. "I didn't think he would commit suicide, or I would have done more. I don't know whether he did commit suicide or not. No one does, really."

The tragedy of Reeves' death marked the loss of a promising talent. Reeves' passing ended a new direction in horror filmmaking that he had begun. Like James Dean a generation before him, Reeves quickly mastered the dynamics of his art, then infused it with his own, unique resources and ideas to take it to a higher level. Unlike Dean, who had a handful of acolytes—such as Dennis Hopper—to continue and refine his tradition, Reeves' artistry died without heirs. □

*Rupert Davies interview and portions of the interview with Ian Ogilvy by Chris Knight. Gordon Hessler interview by Steve Biodrowski and David Del Valle. Research materials by Tim Lucas.*

Relaxing on the set during location filming at Brandeston: Hilary Dwyer (l), Rupert Davies (c), being prepared for his role as Dwyer's father, and Reeves (r).



# Still HOWLING

## After All These Years

**Five sequels and still counting, how the horror hit turned into the video institution.**

By John Thonen

Jason was allowed to count to VIII in Paramount's now moribund FRIDAY THE 13TH franchise. Freddy is due to have his sixth NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET later this year. And Michael, the slasher of HALLOWEEN, stopped trick-or-treating after five seasons. But there is another, less recognized horror series that seems poised to leave the other's roman numerals in the dust and perhaps even reach the rarified level of double digits. As you read this, HOWLING VI: THE FREAKS has just debuted at your local video store and THE HOWLING VII is in pre-production.

While most series rely on a recurring central character, THE HOWLING films form an anthology connected only by their Lycanthropic subject matter. The only other common thread to be found in all six, soon to be seven, films is the name of producer Steven Lane in the credits. Lane, and partner Bob Pringle, are on the brink of becoming major independent film producers. Upcoming projects for their company, Allied/Lane/Pringle, include adaptations of Stephen King's *The Lawn Mow-*



Executive producer Stephen Lane (l), who controls THE HOWLING film rights, and producer Bob Pringle, during the filming of HOWLING V in Budapest, Hungary.

*er Man* and *The Mauler*. In addition, Lane owns the film rights to *Phantoms*, a book by bestselling author Dean R. Koontz. But the path to success has been a rocky one for Lane.

In 1980, Lane was the owner of a chain of West Coast movie theatres. He was also an avid reader of horror fiction, particularly the then up-and-coming King, and was impressed by the author's book jacket blurb on a copy of Gary Brandner's *The Howling*. Recalled Lane, "I'd been thinking for some time about trying to get into film production and I decided,

rather naively, to try and buy the rights to the book and make a film based on it."

Lane found out that the rights to the book were already in the hands of Warner Bros, who had done almost nothing with them in two years. Lane decided to try and take an option on the property through Warners, but found that they had sold the rights to Jack Conrad that same week. "I tracked Conrad down and we became partners," said Lane. "He was really more interested in the filmmaking end. He didn't have a lot of business background, which I did. So I was to

produce and he was to direct."

Eventually the duo ended up at Avco-Embassy, a now-defunct independent that was looking for film projects that would let them compete with the major studios. But, according to Lane, Conrad was unable to get along with the studio and was removed. "That was the end of Jack's involvement in the film and pretty much the end of mine," recalled Lane. "Embassy dumped virtually all of our pre-production materials and script and started over with Joe Dante. Conrad and I both got a credit but we really had nothing to do with it."

Lane was present during the filming and had nothing but praise for Dante and the film. But despite being a major hit, Lane maintained he never saw any money from THE HOWLING. "That was one of the many tough lessons about this business," said Lane. "Embassy was in pretty tough financial straits at the time and they wrote off a lot of other problems as costs on THE HOWLING. Shortly after that they changed hands." Norman Lear (TV producer of ALL IN THE FAMILY) now owns Embassy and, reportedly bothered by the company's exploitation roots, sold off the rights to many of its films that didn't fit



Elizabeth Brooks made a memorable wolf bitch as Marsha, in the original 1981 film that made a name for director Joe Dante. Now a video staple, **HOWLING VI** hits store shelves June 12.

his image, including *THE HOWLING*.

"I bought out Conrad's share after he left," said Lane. "So sequel rights were mine, and a lot of people were interested in financing one. However, I couldn't do a direct sequel to Dante's film as those rights were Embassy's. I was determined I was going to turn a profit somehow on the investment, so I shopped for the best deal I could find. That turned out to be with Hemdale who offered the proverbial 'too good to be true' deal. And of course, it was. They could offer me a great deal since they had absolutely no intention of honoring it."

Lane agreed with the generally abysmal opinion of *HOWLING II* but thinks fans are mistaken to aim all the blame at director Philippe Mora. "Philippe is a sincere and fairly talented guy," said Lane. "He had every intention of making a good film. No one could have turned out anything worthwhile out of that mess. The way in which Philippe first became involved has a lot to say about Hemdale. He had just finished a film for them on a decent budget with Kathleen Turner and Rutger Hauer [*A BREED APART*], which they had yet to pay him for. They told him if he would direct *HOWLING II* they would pay him for both films. I'm not really sure he ever got paid for either. We were finishing up production on *V* when I finally got my first financial statement on *II* out of Hemdale. There is probably litigation to come on this so I can't say too much, but I would certainly have nothing good to say about Hemdale. It was just

## HOWLING AT HEMDALE

**"Hemdale offered the proverbial 'too good to be true' deal [to make *HOWLING II*]. And, of course, it was. They could offer a great deal because they had no intention of honoring it."**



The werewolf suit worn and built by Jeff Shank for *THE HOWLING* (1981). Inset: Helping Belinda Balaski with her filing, Joe Dante's comedic approach.

another hard lesson."

Hemdale had represented that they had the money to produce *HOWLING II*, but ultimately it turned out they didn't. Pre-production and actual production started and stopped several times because funds ran out and the shooting location was shuffled around the globe as Hemdale frantically sought money in various international markets. Book

author Gary Brandner, involved as scriptwriter, has stated that he was repeatedly asked to rewrite the script to take into account Hemdale's locale changes—from Los Angeles to Mexico, to Spain to Yugoslavia. It was there that Brandner parted company with the production. Brandner has stated that his script was extensively rewritten, and Lane confirmed that.

"I had set up what I thought was a good deal and the whole thing fell apart," said Lane.

"On the original *HOWLING*, it fell apart in a positive way. The results were different from my plans, but it was a good film. Not so with *II*."

One of the names that crops up in the credits of most of *THE HOWLING* films is that of special effects expert Steve Johnson. With credits that include work on *GHOST-BUSTERS* and *THE ABYSS*, Johnson worked as part of Rob Bottin's crew on the original film. "I can't point at much there as mine," said Johnson. "I did a lot of sculpting and hair work. There is lots of hair work on these films." Johnson laughed. "I worked extensively on the jet werewolves that were to burst from the burning barn at the end. But no one was happy with those and they got cut."

On *THE HOWLING II*, Johnson answered an ad for technicians to go to Czechoslovakia to apply makeups that were to be designed and fabricated in the U.S. by Ellis "Sonny" Burman, a member of the legendary Burman family of makeup effects artists, who had formed a short-lived company called *Cosmekinetics*. "I basically walked into the interview, confirmed that I had a passport and was given the job," said Johnson. "I think the production was collapsing even that early on. All I did was apply what was sent over from Sonny's studio."

Like Lane, Johnson laid the blame for most of the film's problems on Hemdale. "They [*Cosmekinetics*] weren't getting paid," said Johnson. "Things changed from day to day, even hour to hour. There was no time, no money, no

### THE HOWLING ★★★★★

Avco/Embassy, 1981. Directed by Joe Dante. With: Dee Wallace, Christopher Stone, Elizabeth Brooks, Patrick Macnee.

The film that made Joe Dante a "name" director is a vast improvement over Gary Brandner's mediocre book. Dante's mix of horror and humor has seldom been done better. Dee Wallace is an ideal mix of '50s female and '80s liberated woman. Elizabeth Brooks is marvelous as the seductive wolf bitch. Dante is among the most subversive and iconoclastic filmmakers working regularly in the Hollywood mainstream.



Dante directs Shank during post-production effects filming.

This early effort is a bit atypical in that it is probably his closest approximation to commercial Hollywood standards. The groundbreaking special effects are by some of the best talents in the field. Even after ten years it's still a howl.

### THE HOWLING II: YOUR SISTER IS A WEREWOLF ●

Hemdale, 1984. Directed by Philippe Mora. With: Christopher Lee, Reb Brown, Sybil Danning.

A cheap, threadbare production with atrocious special effects all but hidden



Robert Picardo in makeup wiz Rob Bottin's transformation.



plans." Ultimately there were also basically no effects. The production changes and re-writes made much of what was already done impractical and there wasn't time to shoot it anyway. "We got by with suits, some hair, and some fangs," Lane referred to the film's effects as the "PLANET OF THE APES suits."

A few effects were shot in the U.S. in post-production, making integration with the actors, sets or scenery impossible. Hence, they were filmed in very low light. Viewers just assume the low light level is to cover up the weak effects work, not Hemdale's incompetence. "I think they filmed that way to try and hide the fact that these scenes were done months later and thousands of miles away," said Johnson. "Sonny is still in the business. He's a talented guy, but after that he just sort of let the company fade away. I think the experience was just too bad. The best thing that came out of my involvement in the film was developing a relationship with Steve Lane and his partner Bob Pringle. They are really two of the nicer guys you are going to meet in this business."

Mora was understandably upset with how the film turned out, and as a fan himself wanted to try and rectify things. The Paris-born Mora returned to Australia where he was raised and started his film career, and put together the financing for HOWLING III. He took the package to Lane, who, by this time, was nearly ready to give up on the entire idea of ever making money off his rights in the property.

"You can say what you want about Mora's directorial work but he is one hell of a producer," said Lane. "He put together a great package and it was a joy to work down there. I think the film turned out well. Some people like it, some don't. There doesn't seem to be much middle ground. But it is the film we set out to make and I'll stand by it."

**W**hile still in the hole from the financial debacle of I and II, THE HOWLING III was financially successful enough to encourage Lane to try again. HOWLING IV taught him more hard lessons.

"I was approached by a producer with a studio production deal in Africa," said Lane. "It seemed like a great deal, a tax shelter type thing, which is how a lot of films were getting made during that period. The producer had a long track record and we had the idea to go back to the original story, back to something similar to what Conrad and I had planned for the first one." Unfortunately, the producer in question was the notorious, the ubiquitous, the infamous Harry Alan Towers, whose career spans several decades beginning with those dreadful Chris Lee/Fu Manchu films of the Sixties, and encompasses numerous, usually worthless, remakes including three versions of Agatha Christie's TEN LITTLE INDIANS ('65, '76, '89).

"I don't really understand how guys like Harry work," said Lane. "He has made a career out of making bad films



Makeup effects supervisor Todd Masters coaches Brendan Hughes, walking with wolf's haunches in HOWLING VI, an inventive effect cut from the final film. Inset: Hughes in Master's werewolf design.

and going bankrupt. He's sort of a low-end Dino DeLaurentiis. I think it was a pretty typical production for him. When we got there he was gone. Lots of what he had promised wasn't there. We found we were working in South Africa though he had said it was a neighboring country. A lot of us weren't too comfortable with that. It was a dreadful experience."

To make matters worse, what had seemed like an excellent choice of director turned out to be a similar catastrophe.

"John Hough had done several fine films that gave us every reason to think he was a great choice," said Lane. "LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE is something of a classic, I think, and DIRTY MARY, CRAZY LARRY is one hell of a low-budget action picture. I was very pleased to get him. But I don't think he ever had any real idea what to do with the film. He was completely lost. He didn't understand the effects, he paced the film badly—there are damn few scares. It's just a lot of talk with just a

by being staged in near darkness. Blame the shoddiness on producer Hemdale, not the artists involved. The whole film, in fact, looks like it was lit by flashlight. Though truly an awful film, stars Lee, Brown and Danning have all made worse. Lots worse. Memorable mostly for the oft-repeated, twin special effects displayed by Danning.

**THE HOWLING III: THE MARSUPIALS** ★★½

Bacannia, 1987. Directed by Philippe Mora. With: Imogen Annesley, Dasha Blahova, Max Fairchild.



Sybil Danning as HOWLING II's Wolf Queen Stirba, in makeup.

A decent effort that manages to atone for director Mora's involvement in HOWLING II, though his blend of horror and humor is not nearly as smooth as Dante's in the original. Until just released VI, this is the only one of the series to present werewolves in a sympathetic light. Unfortunately, there are few real horror elements, and Mora's self-deprecating sense of Aussie humor makes the film come across as something of a werewolf Dundee. If that sounds a bit silly, it is. But it's also kind of fun.



Dasha Blahova in HOWLING III, transforms in mid-pirouette.

**THE HOWLING IV: THE ORIGINAL NIGHTMARE**

Filmtrax/PLC, Allied Vision Ltd., 1988. Directed by John Hough. With: Romy Windsor, Michael T. Weiss, Antony Hamilton, Susanne Severeid.

This dull, lifeless mess from director John Hough, responsible for the genre semi-classic THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE, is an endlessly talky retreat of the original. Non-descript South African locations give the film a feeling of falseness beyond the worst studio-locked cheapie. Lanya Derval's erotic werewolf is nearly as good as



Bruce Martyn Payne as Harker, the vampire villain of *HOWLING VI*, makeup by series stalwart Steve Johnson. Inset: Johnson's makeup for the Alligator Boy (Sean Gregory Sullivan), Harker's freak.

few minutes of Steve Johnson's effects to keep you awake."

Johnson designed the film's main shape-shifting werewolf and went to Africa for the last two weeks of shooting to oversee its operation personally, though makeup for most of the shoot was supervised by his crew. "I can attest to what a mess the production was," said Johnson, whose suit only saw a few seconds screen time. "I was pleased with the meltdown transformation idea. It was a new twist on the shape-

shifter thing. But I don't think the director really knew what to do with it and it wasn't filmed to proper advantage. I let them use the suit again on *V*, but it's just barely glimpsed."

*HOWLING IV*, despite its lack of quality, was still a hit on video and convinced Lane that the series was financially viable. The bad production experience also convinced Lane and Pringle to become "hands-on" producers who deal with every facet of pre-production, production, and post-production. "We had made three sequels,

two of which were dreadful, but all of them were successful," said Lane. "I knew that another would be too if I could just keep personal control of the production."

One of the international hands involved in *IV*'s finances was Allied Music, an international entertainment conglomerate that can claim to handle most of the world's major rock tours and events like "Live Aid" and the staging of Pink Floyd's "The Wall" at the demolished Berlin Wall last year. Allied Music was interested in branching out into film financing and production and, according to Lane, were none too happy with their experience with Harry Alan Towers. Thus was born Allied/Lane/Pringle Productions.

*HOWLING V* was the first film to be made under the new corporate banner. The film was shot in Budapest, Hungary and production went smoothly, benefiting from the foreign locale and the use of an actual medieval castle. Clive Turner, a part of Allied, contributed his second *HOWLING* script for *V*, inspired by Agatha Christie's *TEN LITTLE INDIANS*. Effects expenditures were kept to a minimum to put the emphasis on gothic European atmosphere, an approach both Turner and Lane wanted to try.

The just-released *HOWLING VI* is something of a departure for the franchise, offering its werewolf as hero, and being the first in the series to film in the U.S. since Dante's original. There is also a connec-

tion between *VI* and the already in the works *VII*. Screenwriter Kevin Rock decided to do more than just reach back for a classic werewolf in the style of the '40s Lon Chaney Jr.; he also brought in elements of Tod Browning's classic *FREAKS* (1932).

Johnson returned to create the film's alligator boy, one of its key freaks, and Harker, its vampire villain. "I always try to do something different when I'm dealing with a subject that has been portrayed so many times before," said Johnson. "The script, and the producers, wanted a real monster for the vampire. Luckily, Bruce Payne [who portrays Harker] had a vision similar to mine. He wanted a very elegant and suave approach. It's a little classic, with *Nosferatu* allusions mixed with a real demonic look. I was pretty pleased with it.

"I don't do a lot of low-budget work anymore," said Johnson, who declined to handle all the film's makeup chores. "The money is just too low to really do your best, and who wants to keep doing less than they are capable of. But I kind of enjoy working on *THE HOWLING* pictures. I like Steve and Bob and the films are low-key, low pressure. No one expects miracles from you and wants them yesterday. After doing something like *THE ABYSS* [Johnson built the transparent, glowing underwater aliens] which damn near killed everybody involved, something like these films is kind of fun."

Johnson admitted the simple technique he developed for Harker's disintegration death

Elizabeth Brooks in the original, and makeup artist Steve Johnson provides an imaginative twist on the staple transformation sequence.

A dismal flop that should have spelled the end of the series. Instead it was another video hit. Speed search can make anything palatable.

### THE HOWLING V: THE REBIRTH

Allied Vision/Lane/Pringle Prod., 1989. Directed by Neil Sundstrom. With: Philip Davios, Victoria Calitin, Elizabeth She.

The first installment of



Lanya Derval as wolf bitch Elinor in *HOWLING IV*.

the series to take itself seriously, but no great shakes. The story is perilously close to the old Amicus chestnut *THE BEAST MUST DIE* (1974), as a diverse, isolated group tries to figure out which of them is a werewolf. Minimal gore and special effects, a solid ensemble cast, plus gothic atmosphere provide an old-fashioned feel recalling the Hammer films of the '60s and '70s.

Benefits greatly from Hungarian locations and a real-life castle, but the characters are strictly ster-



Mike Elizalde in *V*, a Johnson suit revamped by Kevin Brennan.

turned out pretty well but declined to elaborate on how it was done. Said Johnson, "I hate to keep secrets, but I'd like to get the chance to use it once or twice in more widely-seen films before everybody starts using it."

Todd Masters, once Johnson's partner, handled the balance of HOWLING VI's make-up effects. Masters saw much of his best work left on the cutting room floor, a sequence involving an upright, walking werewolf with an animal's back legs and haunches. Jeff and Steve Shank had accomplished the illusion on THE HOWLING [11:3:43] with rod puppets suggested by Rob Bottin, and several films have done similar monsters by placing a costumed actor in a complex harness and suspending him from wires *a la* PUMPKIN-HEAD and FLY II.

"The legs go all the way up to the actor's thigh and are jointed everywhere his leg is, and that carries all the way down these two-foot haunches," explained Masters. "The weight is distributed all the way down. The ankle can't carry that weight so we redistribute it to the hamstrings. The haunches have to be exact, cast from the performer who is to wear them. They can't be off by even a millimeter. We've applied for a patent on the design."

Masters was disappointed that much of the effects, as well as an elaborate werewolf transformation in the carnival, was dropped but is philosophical about it. "That's the old story for effects people," said Masters. "All you can do is design it and build it. After that it's out of your hands. You can't con-

## KEEP 'EM HOWLING

**"We had made three sequels, two of which were dreadful," said producer Stephen Lane, "but all were successful. I knew another would be too if I could keep control of production."**



Bill Foertsch wore makeup designer Steve Johnson's werewolf suit in HOWLING IV (1988), the culmination of an elaborate melt-down transformation sequence.

rol how it's filmed or even if it's used. If you're going to work in this business, you just have to accept it."

First-time director Hope Perello, a veteran of low-budget production work for Charles Band, confessed to being much of the force behind cutting Masters' effects scenes. "There was nothing wrong with them from an effects standpoint, but I never wanted to make an effects film in the first place," said Perello. "However effective they might have been, they didn't advance the film or the characters and I wanted this to

be a character-driven film."

Perello also did some extensive (uncredited) rewriting of Rock's script to emphasize the action and to make the vampire less of a one-dimensional bad guy. She also turned the concept for the freak show carnival from one with rides and cotton candy to a slightly darker approach that took its inspiration from old world European troupes.

The 25-day shoot went relatively smoothly and Perello is generally pleased with the outcome. "You can always find fault," she said, "but it's pretty

close to what I envisioned it to be." Still, Perello doubts she'll be wearing the horror director hat much in the future. "I'm not much of a fan really. I like thrillers and films where the horror develops from psychological terror rather than the visceral."

Meanwhile, the series that just won't die continues to howl along. No date has been set for the production of HOWLING VII but a Kevin Rock screenplay is ready and Steve Johnson is reading it to make a bid on the effects. It's expected that the film will be shot in Hungary, sometime this year.

"The budget on these films is always in the \$3 million range," said Lane. "It's low by industry standards, but we aren't talking a \$300,000 direct-to-video schlock flick either. These are real movies. All of them have had theatrical release in various regions of the world but in the U.S. they are video staples." Indeed, virtually any video store one enters has at least a couple of them, and most have the whole series.

"Each tape consistently sells in the 80,000 units range in the U.S.," said Lane. "I don't think that figure would change substantially if we raised the budgets. If we made them for \$10 million we'd just lose money. But we have shown that there is a consistent and loyal audience for these pictures."

Asked how long he expects the series to continue, Lane gave the truly classic producer's reply, one worthy of Sam Arkoff or Roger Corman. "Why, as long as they keep making money, I suppose." □

eotypical. The big mystery is the meaning of the film's subtitle and opening prologue which are never explained.

### THE HOWLING VI: THE FREAKS ★★½

Allied/Lane/Pringle Prod., 1991. Directed by Hope Perello. With: Brendan Hughes, Michele Matheson, Sean Gregory Sullivan, Carol Lynley.

Calling this the best of the series since the original is probably damning it with faint praise. This newest entry, which hit video stores in June, is no genre classic, but demonstrates how the full moon could

still shine bright on the series. VI harkens back to the classic werewolf films of yore by offering a sympathetic, even tragic, figure in the lead. In fact, the werewolf in this film, played by Brendan Hughes (last seen as an aristocratic vampire in TO DIE FOR), is actually the hero.

Bruce Martin Payne plays Harker, a vampire with a traveling carnival who collects freaks for his sideshow, and sees Hughes' werewolf as a desirable added attraction. Payne, as Harker, turns in an electrifying, scenery chewing



Director Hope Perello with the vampire villain of HOWLING VI.

performance of considerable finesse. First time director Hope Perello unfolds the story slowly and deliberately with few of the cheap scares and exploitation trappings that one has come to expect of direct-to-video releases. Instead, Perello concentrates on developing a distinctive small-town atmosphere and a timeless quality to the characters and *noir* carnival setting. The result is a solid little "B" picture that delivers what it promises and remains interesting and entertaining throughout.

# MANIAC COP 2

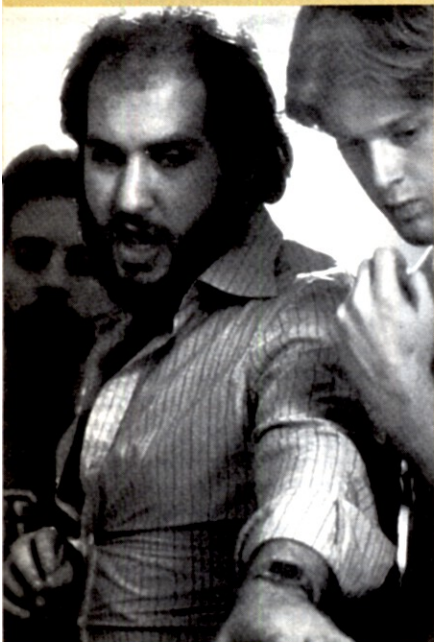
**Director William Lustig films a monster movie disguised as a gritty police drama.**

By Dan Scapperotti

The weather had turned sour in New York. A driving snow changed to a steady rain and the roof of the Ashley Hotel was slick and wet. A block away the sky glowed with the light from Times Square's Sony sign. And director William Lustig was not happy. Lustig was walking his actors through a rooftop scene for *MANIAC COP 2* and had just received word that the NYPD had revoked his permit to stage a running shot in a taxi cab because of the weather. It was a delay Lustig could do without.

Although limited theatrical distribution prevented Lustig's original *MANIAC COP* from becoming a big hit in 1988, worldwide video sales were so

Lustig directing *MANIAC* in 1980, his first horror film after a prolific career as a New York-based porno filmmaker.



Robert Z'Dar as the titular slasher in blue in the direct-to-video sequel, makeup by Dean Gates, a supernatural killer now teamed with a demented serial killer.

good that a British distributor decided to finance the sequel, scheduled to hit video shelves June 13 from Live Home Video. The last filmgoers saw of the Maniac Cop he had been impaled on a pole that crashed through the window of a police van as it plunged into the East River. Now he's back, intent on revenge against the Sing Sing inmates who murdered him.

Lustig, who cut his teeth in New York's X-rated market, broke into the more mainstream arena in 1980 with *MANIAC*, a repellent gore film. "I'm a student of 42nd Street," said Lustig, "and the primary fare on 42nd Street is horror and action. I have a love for both genres. With the *MANIAC COP* films I can work in both. I call it a cross between *THE FRENCH CONNECTION* and *FRANKENSTEIN*. It's a monster movie disguised as a gritty police drama."

Lustig hadn't intended to make a sequel but when producer Larry Cohen delivered the script he changed his mind. "This is so much better than the first film," said Lustig. "It has a lot of fully developed characters and the stunt gags are sensational." The supernatural element hinted at in the first film has been expanded, with Lustig focusing on the strange relationship between Cordell, the Maniac Cop, again played by Robert Z'Dar, and Turkell (Leo Rossi), a serial killer.

Z'Dar and Rossi walked across the roof, during filming, trying to avoid the puddles, while Lustig offered them some chicken soup. "Their paths cross at a would-be victim, and a friendship develops between the two," said Lustig. "The Maniac Cop doesn't speak in the film. The relationship is basically a lot like that between Igor and Frankenstein in *SON OF FRANKEN-*

STEIN."

Lustig had been very disappointed with the makeup in the original *MANIAC COP*. "I thought it was one of the weakest parts of the first film," said Lustig. "When we decided to do the sequel we looked at about a dozen makeup people and chose Dean Gates. We had to use the first makeup as a sort of point of departure, expanding on that. The appliances take about two hours to put on."

With a budget more than three times the original, Lustig said he was able to spend more time on the film's 42-day schedule working with the actors. "I'm shooting them a little more creatively, instead of just having people talk across a desk," he said.

The film's complement of stunts includes fire burn scenes Lustig felt would become a bench mark for the industry. "The Maniac Cop is on fire for three or four minutes, fighting people while ablaze," said Lustig. "We did eight full-body burns and we did two full-body burns going through a prison brick wall, falling six stories into the top of a bus, all on fire. The filming was nerve-racking because we didn't get to the shot until 5:30 a.m. and fifteen minutes later the sun rose."

Although the prolific Larry Cohen took producer credit on the film, Lustig advised that "Quite frankly, Larry doesn't supervise production. We work together on the screenplay and we discuss any changes I want to make, but Larry leaves production alone. In practice I'm producer and director of the film, although the credit doesn't read that way." □

# FILM RATINGS

## THE BANKER

Directed by William Webb. Cinemas (cable TV), 1/91, 90 mins. With: Robert Forster, Duncan Regehr, Shanna Reed, Jeff Conaway.

Bored with films about the serial murders of cardboard characters?—this is a refreshing riff on the usual formula. Duncan Regehr plays a conservative chairman of an L.A. bank, who has spent time among primitives in South America and, for a reason never overtly explained (he's collecting souls to become immortal), is practicing some kind of ritual murder in which he paints his face and kills (mostly women) with a handheld crossbow fitted with a laser sight.

What sets the film apart is the murderer's flamboyance and apparent disregard for the possibility of being identified and captured. Regehr drives around in a flashy red sports car with vanity plates, making him an easy target for blackmail when seen leaving the scene of the crime. A subplot involving TV newswoman Shanna Reed and her antagonistic relationship with ex-lover Robert Forster as the cop who is assigned to the case is standard formula stuff, however. **• Judith P. Harris**

## CIRCUITRY MAN

Directed by Steven Lovy. RCA-Columbia Video, 2/91, 92 mins. With: Jim Metzler, Dana Wheeler-Nicholson, Vernon Wells.

Surprisingly entertaining comedy-thriller with "cyberpunk" overtones, set in a dystopian U.S. in which the population lives underground to avoid the polluted surface world. Computer chips are the new contraband, and most people have input jacks in their skulls ready to "plug in" to various devices. Synthetic human

Dana Wheeler-Nicholson and Jim Metzler in *CIRCUITRY MAN*, smuggling hot computer chips in a cypberpunk low-budgeter.



Jim Metzler—a professional gigolo dressed like the hero of a romance novel—and female bodyguard Dana Wheeler-Nicholson run a shipment of hot chips across the continent, pursued by the wacky, sinister "Plug-head" (Vernon Wells). A witty script, good pacing, and a cast of bizarre and amusing characters makes this an enjoyable diversion. **•• David Wilt**

## DEFENDING YOUR LIFE

Directed by Albert Brooks. Warner Bros. 3/91, 111 mins. With: Albert Brooks, Meryl Streep, Rip Torn, Lee Grant.

In the cinema of comic anxiety, Albert Brooks has been best at depicting the fears and foibles of yuppies. He's frequently in top form in this quirky comedy about what happens to you when you die. As ad man Daniel Miller, Brooks finds himself in Judgment City, an afterlife way station that is part hotel, part criminal court system, and part Universal Studios Tour. He and myriad other souls must endure a mock trial in which they are judged for how they have dealt with fear in their lives, a bugaboo for Brooks. To complicate matters, Brooks meets and falls in love with the right girl (Meryl Streep), who seems more likely to move on while Brooks is doomed to reincarnation on Earth. It's a heavenly, hilarious send-up of people's feelings of inadequacy and of status consciousness. **••• Dennis K. Fischer**

## THE DOORS

Directed by Oliver Stone. Tri-Star, 2/91, 141 mins. With: Val Kilmer, Meg Ryan, Kevin Dillon, Kyle MacLachlan.

Affording a gloriously wide-screen window on the past, director Oliver Stone's parox-



Spot, the dog, turns bug, the horrifically funny highpoint of *MEET THE APPLLEGATES*, makeup effects designed by Kevin Yagher.

ysmal bio-pic about one of the '60s' premier rock groups seems beamed from Mars in its delirious celebration of physical energy and mind-expanding quest. Val Kilmer's inspired tightrope walk as Lizard King Jim Morrison is the project's undeniable anchor: a dazzling portrayal of self-destruction that never becomes merely obnoxious or tedious (unlike Pink Floyd's *THE WALL*).

But it is Stone's memory-suffused recreation of the band's concert frenzies, his all-stops-odded to the sheer joy of being young and seeming eternal, that gives the movie such an adrenalin spin. Stone's eager camera weaves and dips past, over, and through hordes of screaming fans with an almost Riefenstahl-like delight in the shimmering volume of crowds. And right from the opening recall of the Morrison family's 1949 trek across a Southwestern desert (with magnificently lowering clouds and brittle lightning supplied by Industrial Light & Magic), Stone's film generates a seductively occult aura of Native American shamanism, *ALTERED STATES* ecstasies, gothic blood rituals, and a free-floating pantheism. **••• Charles Leayman**

## L.A. STORY

Directed by Mick Jackson. Tri-Star, 2/91, 95 mins. With: Steve Martin, Victoria Tennant, Richard E. Grant, Marilu Henner.

What Woody Allen does for New York, Steve Martin does for L.A., including Allen's touch for fantasy. A sweet, romantic comedy about a match-making freeway sign that speaks in riddles, Martin's film is full of wonderful vignettes on trendy L.A., such as having to meet a snooty res-

taurant head waiter (*STAR TREK*'s Patrick Stewart) at the bank before making a reservation. **••• Judith P. Harris**

## MEET THE APPLLEGATES

Directed by Michael Lehmann. Triton, 2/91, 90 mins. With: Ed Begley Jr., Stockard Channing, Dabney Coleman.

A godawful mess, doubly disappointing for having come from the director of the remarkable *HEATHERS*. You can see that previous film's dark spirit struggling to show itself in this comedy of mutated beetles who, disguised as the typical American family, conspire to start a nuclear holocaust in suburbia, thus reclaiming the world for bugdom. You can also see the punches pulled, the plotlines fumbled, and the mediocrity that results when black comedy is altered and diminished in an ill-fated attempt to go commercial. What's left is one horrifically funny transformation scene of the family dog (good makeup effects by Kevin Yagher), and a golden opportunity to compile your very own list of product tie-ins (amongst the guilty: Butterfinger, Aunt Jemima, Coca-Cola, and Cuisinart). **• Dan Persons**

## NOT OF THIS WORLD

Directed by Jon Daniel Hess. CBS-TV, 2/91, 120 mins. With: Lisa Hartman, A. Martinez, Pat Hingle, Luke Edwards.

Recycling is important in these ecology-conscious times, but scripter Robert Glass takes it to a ridiculous degree. Starting with the title of this TV-movie clunker, uncomfortably close to the fondly remembered 1956 Roger Corman cheapie. Glass and director Jon Daniel Hess mix elements of *KRONOS* (1957), *THE*

*BLOB* (1958) and *ALIEN* (1979) to tell the story of a shape-changing creature that comes to earth in a meteor and feeds on energy—animal's, people's or electrical.

The creature is seen only briefly in its early stages but its final huge form, a lumbering behemoth with a wide, toothy, sideways-opening mouth that looks like a fish tail, is one of the tackiest effects fabrications ever, the work of Alex Rambaldi, who doesn't seem to have inherited the talent of his Oscar-winning father Carlo Rambaldi, the creator of *E.T.* **• Judith P. Harris**

## A NYMPHOID BARBARIAN IN DINOSAUR HELL

Directed by Brett Piper. Troma/USA Cable, 1/91, 120 mins. With: Linda Corwin, Paul Guzzi, Alex Pirnie, Marc Deshales.

This is the leisurely tale of a day in the life of the titular Nymphoid (Linda Corwin) who is continually beaten over the head and abducted by one barbarian or mutant after another, while her boyfriend (Paul Guzzi, who wears a good deal more eyeliner than she does) chases after. There is little dialogue, a relief since the entire soundtrack is post-synched and sounds it, and few laughs.

The stop-motion dinosaur effects by Cheap Tricks are surprisingly good in this characteristically titled and character-

Reviewed Overleaf:  
Clare Wren as the murdering android in *STEEL AND LACE*, displaying her gory roto roter.



# FILM RATINGS

istically subpar effort from Troma. The animated saurians are not the usual Triceratops, Brontosaurus and Tyranosaurus Rex, but a whole new, inventively designed species—except for an overly familiar sand worm, nicely matched to a full-sized live-action prop. But you might as well fast-forward through the rest of this dull effort, set twenty years after a one-day war has destroyed Tromaville. A handful of survivors have reverted to barbarism, braving the menace of mutants (adequate mask-like makeups) and a return of the dinosaurs.

• Judith P. Harris

## POPCORN

Directed by Mark Herrier. Studio Three, 2/91, 90 mins. With: Tom Villard, Jill Schoelen, Dee Wallace Stone, Ray Wabston.

Writer Alan Ormsby was wise to take a pseudonym—the telling Tod Hackett—after being replaced as director by Mark Herrier in mid-shoot. The resulting film is a tedious, overly complicated slasher picture, slightly redeemed by its attempt to parody '50s genre films. The parodies—largely directed by Ormsby—are, without a doubt, the best thing on view, but even they are pretty much one-joke affairs. They're scintillating, however, next to the unbelievable main plot, peopled with cardboard characters and staged with annoying slapstick. Jill Schoelen is irritatingly whiny as the girl in peril. It's high time she made some other kind of film—she's done her time as a screamer. • Judith P. Harris

## PUPPET MASTER II

Directed by David Allen. Paramount, 2/91, 89 mins. With: Elizabeth MacLellan, Collin Bernsen, Charlie Spradling.

Superior to the original, but not the definitive killer-puppet movie. The sequel resurrects the band of deadly, animated puppets seen in the 1989 original, based in an old hotel on the California coast. This time they are in search of human brains, the main component of the fluid that gives them life. Packed with references to old horror films, the sequel has a lot of plot deficiencies, but generally holds one's interest. Oddly enough, considering that director David Allen is himself an animator, the puppets themselves don't have that much to do. And once again, most of the cast—this time a group of government psychic researchers—is rather callously dispatched in sundry ways.

•• David Wilt

## SHOCK 'EM DEAD

Directed by Mark Freed. Academy Entertainment, 2/91, 94 mins. With Traci Lords, Stephen Quadros, Aldo Ray.

FILM TITLE	●●●		●●		●			○	
	MUST SEE	EXCELLENT	GOOD	MEDIOCRE	POOR				
	FSC	JPH	AJ	BK	GK	DS	DSC		
ALICE/Woody Allen Orion, 12/90, 106 mins.		●●		●●	●●	●	●●		
CHILD'S PLAY/John Lafia Universal, 11/90, 85 mins.	●	●	○	●	○		○		
DARK SHADOWS/Dan Curtis NBC-TV, weekly series, 60 mins.	●	●●		○	●●	●●			
EDWARD SCISSORHANDS/Tim Burton Fox, 12/90, 98 mins.	●●●●	●●	●●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●		
EVE OF DESTRUCTION/Duncan Gibbins Orion, 1/91.	●	○		●	●●		○		
THE FLASH/Gail Morgan Hickman CBS-TV, weekly series, 30 mins.	●●	○	●●	●	●●	●●	●		
FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND/Roger Corman Fox, 11/90, 85 mins.	●●●	●	●	●	●●		●●●		
GRAVEYARD SHIFT/Ralph S. Singleton Paramount, 10/90, 87 mins.	○	○	○	○	●●	●	●		
JACOB'S LADDER/Adrian Lyne Tri-Star, 11/90, 117 mins.	●●	○	○	●	●●●	●	●		
L.A. STORY/Mick Jackson Tri-Star, 2/91, 95 mins.		●●●	●●	●●	●		●●●		
MEET THE APPLIGATES/Michael Lehmann New World, 1/91, 82 mins.		●●●	●●	○		●	●●●		
MISERY/Rob Reiner Columbia, 11/90, 107 mins.	●●●●	●	●●	●●	●●●	●●	●●●		
MR. DESTINY/James Orr Buena Vista, 10/90, 105 mins.	●●	○		●	●●		●		
NEVERENDING STORY II/ Geroge Miller, Warner Bros., 2/91, 89 mins.	●	●	○	●	●●		●●		
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD/ Tom Savini, Columbia, 10/90, 89 mins.	●●●●	●●●		●	●●	●●	●●		
NOTHING BUT TROUBLE/Dan Aykroyd Warner Bros., 2/91, 93 mins.	○	○		●	●●		●		
NOT OF THIS WORLD/ Jon Daniel Hess, CBS, 2/91, 120 mins.			○	○	●	●			
POPCORN/Alan Ormsby Movie Partners, 2/91, mins.		●	●	●	●	●●	●●		
PREDATOR 2/Stephen Hopkins Fox, 11/90, 108 mins.	●●●	●	○	●	●	●●●	●●		
THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER/ Disney, 11/90, 110 mins.	●●	●●		●	●●●	●●	●		
ROBOT JOX/Stuart Gordon Triumph, 11/90, 84 mins.	●	○		●	●	●●	●●		
SILENCE OF THE LAMBS/Jonathan Demme Orion, 2/91, 118 mins.	●●●●	●●		●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●●		
SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY/ Joseph Ruben, Fox, 1/91, 98 mins.	●	●●●		●	●	●●	●		
STAR TREK: NEXT GENERATION/ Gene Roddenberry, TV series, 60 mins.		●●●		●●	●●●		●●●		
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II/ Michael Pressman, New Line, 3/91, 88 mins.	●	●		●●	●●		●●		
WARLOCK/Steve Miner Triumph, 2/91, 102 mins.	●	●●		●●	●●	●●	●		

FSC/Frederick S. Clarke JPH/Judith P. Harris AJ/ Alan Jones BK/Bill Kelley  
GK/Gary Kimber DS/Dan Scapperotti DSC/Dan Schweiger

Instantly forgettable low-budget horror film in which a put-upon nerd becomes a rock star in exchange for his soul. He also has to kill people with a magic dagger in order to absorb their life force. But he falls in love with Traci Lords (not hard to do) and this eventually brings him to a messy end. At times the film seems to be striving for a humorous slant, but these moments are few and unsuccessful. Minimal special effects, unrefined acting and a lack of sympathetic characters make this an instantly disposable feature. Not bad enough to be amusing—just bland and overly familiar.

• David Wilt

## STEEL AND LACE

Directed by Ernest Farino. Fries Entertainment, 3/91, 90 mins. With: Bruce Davison, David Naughton, Clare Wren.

Mildly entertaining variation on ROBOCOP, et al.: a rape victim (Clare Wren) commits suicide but is resurrected into a bionic body by her scientist brother (Bruce Davison), who programs her to kill her assailants with various built-in devices in gory ways—one is castrated, one disembowelled, one decapitated, and so on. Production values and special effects are adequate. Plot is familiar but the actors are convincing and the film is well-paced. Enjoyable.

•• David Wilt

## TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE SECRET OF THE OOZE

Directed by Michael Pressman. New Line Cinema, 3/91, 88 mins. With: David Warner, Paige Turco, Ernie Reyes Jr., Lief Tilden, Mark Caso.

In the inevitable sequel to last year's surprise hit, the Renaissance men of martial arts and pizza inhalation, tutored by the fortune-cookie aphorisms of their rodent Obi-wan, embark on a metaphysical quest into their toxic waste genesis. The malleable costumes, expressive eyes, and athletic exuberance of the shell-backed quartet is intact, but the novelty of the act isn't. Lots of nunchakus, backflips, and

wisecracks buzz through the air, with the latter dropping with an especially dull thud. Meanwhile a pair of new ooze-spawned mutations are cooked up to give Mike, Donny, Leo, and Raf some fresh competition and to provide the guys at Jim Henson's Creature Shop steady work.

The humans, as it were, are left hanging on a string. As the test tube jockey, David Warner registers only somnolence. As the newscaster and tortoise housemother, Paige Turco has little to do but chuckle indulgently at the antics of those darn Turtles. As the serviceable point of identification for pre-pubescent boys' imagination, Ernie Reyes Jr. is good but underused. The film is also noisy and badly lit, but for sheer over-the-top shamelessness, the subterranean low is the Dance Fever sequence featuring Vanilla Ice, wherein the Aryan rapper leads the Turtles and the dance floor in chants of "Go, Ninja, Go!" Apparently, the secret of the ooze is to spread it around, cover the whole field, and hope for a bumper crop of fertilizer rug rats. A cynical piece of commerce for anyone over the mental age of seven.

• Thomas Doherty

## THE VANISHING

Directed by George Sluizer. Tara Releasing, 1988, 107 mins. With: Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu, Gene Bervoets, Johannanna Ter Steege, Gwen Eckhaus.

An exceptionally fine psychological tale of horror made in 1988 by Dutch director George Sluizer, just now finding its way to North America. A young Dutch couple on holiday stop at a busy roadside variety store, whereupon the woman disappears. The man, overwhelmed by grief, becomes obsessed with finding out what happened to his wife. He eventually does, to his eternal regret.

The story is told in a way that keeps you guessing. You have to pay close attention to understand what's going on. Is the villain keeping his victim alive somewhere? Did the wife plot this out in advance so she could start a new life? Is she dead? Tortured and released? All is revealed and told in such a way as to be totally engrossing.

The abductor, played superbly by Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu, is a charming, intelligent chemistry teacher with a devoted family who has a sociopath's psychology. The final scenes of his bucolic observation of his wife and two daughters attending to his newly bought country home will leave you with a cold frisson of terror up your spine.

••• Gary Kimber

# silence of the lambs

**Shooting Jonathan Demme's arty shocker was a family affair.**

*By Dan Persons*

There was never any doubt that Thomas Harris' superb thriller *The Silence of the Lambs* would be turned into a movie. For a while, though, there was some question as to who exactly would be performing the task. Published in 1988, the book became the object of a furious bidding war, with several studios vying for screen rights. Chief amongst the competitors was Orion Pictures, bidding at the insistence of actor Gene Hackman, who wanted the book for his directorial debut. And it was Orion

that emerged victorious, only to discover their fledgling director stricken with a severe case of cold feet over the thought of helming a film featuring no less than two serial killers, a half-dozen corpses, and more flayings than occurred in all of the Dark Ages.

Stuck with a hot property and no director, Orion's then-president Mike Medavoy came up with a curious replacement: Jonathan Demme, director of such comedies as *CITIZENS BAND*, *SOMETHING WILD*, and *MARRIED TO THE MOB*. Reasons were provided for the choice: the latter two



Orion played down the film's horror angle with an intriguing, classy ad campaign.

films had been released by Orion, and the director had an on-going production deal with the company. But even Demme, in interviews given during the film's premiere, had to concede the unorthodoxy of his selection, and admit his initial lack of enthusiasm for the entire concept.

That reluctance vanished once he read the book. For Demme, the idea of bringing the driven, idealistic FBI trainee Clarice Starling to life was irresistible. "You know," he explained to Amy Taubin of *The Village Voice*, "there are movies about women from an external point of view and then there are movies that get the joke—that understand about the endless, abrasive difficulties of wading through the patriarchy in the course of a day... I wanted to make a gripping entertainment in which the heroine was never sexually threatened, and I wanted to take a subtle poke at the patriarchy."

At Demme's request, Anthony Hopkins was signed to portray the coolly evil Dr. Hannibal Lector. The director's first choice for Starling, Mi-

chelle Pfeiffer (who also starred in *MARRIED TO THE MOB*), turned down the role, a loss Demme overcame once word reached him that Academy Award-winner Jodie Foster was anxious to play the part.

With a budget that co-producer Edward Saxon typed as "under \$20 million," Demme began assembling his stock production team, which counts amongst its members those whose work with the director dates as far back as his debut on Roger Corman women-in-prison flick, 1974's *CAGED HEAT*. Those returning to the fold included director of photography Tak Fujimoto, production designer Kristi Zea, editor Craig McKay, executive producer Gary Goetzman, and the producing triumvirate of Saxon, Kenneth Utt, and Ron Bozman. Said Saxon of the team spirit among Demme alumni, "You see, rather than depending on conflict for fuel, Jonathan gets his energy from collaboration. He gets excited by ideas, and likes it when people around him have them. It's a wonderful, collegial, collaborative working environment. And because we work so often

Demme directs Anthony Hopkins as serial killer Hannibal "the Cannibal" Lector.



with the same people, it's a very comfortable way to work."

To realize the numerous corpse and makeup effects needed for the film to represent the handiwork of the film's serial killer Jamie Gumb, nicknamed "Buffalo Bill" for his tendency to skin his victims, Demme brought in specialists Carl Fullerton and Neal Martz (GORKY PARK, WAR-LOCK). Speaking from his New Jersey workshop, Fullerton recalled a pre-production phase marked with both caution and enthusiasm: "There were many, many meetings with Jonathan and [production designer] Kristi Zea and some of the producers as to what the approach of the film was going to be. They were very careful to make sure that it didn't become another horror film, or that it wasn't perceived as a slasher movie. . . . Jonathan was very squeamish about how we were going to approach the bodies in the river and all the aftermath. It was important, in terms of back-story, for the audience to perceive just what a nasty character Gumb was, so they're frightened of him. But how do you give the audience, visually, this background and not make them want to vomit or leave the theatre?"

But if such concerns suggest

Lector's handiwork, fabricated by New York-based effects artists Neal Martz and Carl Fullerton, glimpsed briefly.



## S H E E P ' S C L O T H I N G

**“They were careful to make sure that it wasn't perceived as a slasher movie, another horror film. Demme was very squeamish about how we were going to approach it.”**



Jodie Foster as FBI-trainee Clarice Starling, a role turned down by Michelle Pfeiffer, interviews Lector inside his combination dungeon/high tech holding cell

there was a drive by Demme to tone down the film's effects, Fullerton insisted that the reality was just the opposite: "[Demme] didn't feel our initial renderings were graphic enough. He wanted to explore all the possibilities, explore it in the most violent, graphic manner that anyone could come up with. And after he had an image, then he would pull back on what the audience saw of it. But in terms of what was created for the camera, he didn't pull any punches. If it was raw meat that needed to be made, then it was made and he would choose how much the camera would see."

Shooting began in late November, 1989, and continued through the following March. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and environs were chosen as stand-ins for the story's southern locales. The sequence where Starling seeks out an entomologist to help her examine the chrysalis found in one victim's throat was actually shot at the city's Carnegie Museum of Natural History, while Lector's holding cell, incongruously located in the middle of a luxurious, wood-paneled room, was actually built in the Alle-

gheny County Soldier's and Sailor's Memorial Hall.

For most of the interiors, an abandoned Westinghouse turbine factory (now known as Keystone Commons) was converted into a production facility, providing space enough to accommodate the simultaneous construction of all the sets. According to Ray Mendez (CREEPSHOW), who served the production in the officially credited role of Moth Wrangler and Stylist (along with Leanne Drogin), the building, "felt like it was three-quarters of a mile long by a quarter of a mile wide. It was the biggest building I'd ever been in. You could drive a car in there for a while—it was just amazing."

As for Mendez' winged charges—who in both book and movie become all-important atmospheric elements—the production built a 10' by 10' by 8' mobile lab, complete with work spaces, refrigerators, and full environmental control. Casting the bugs was not difficult: instead of real Death's Head moths, Mendez selected the more common tomato horn worm, gimmicking the creatures with makeup to resemble their more exotic

brethren. The choice saved the production trouble and money, though it did not guarantee the moths' complete cooperation, especially when forced to perform in the cavernous space of a Pittsburgh factory in the dead of winter.

"The animals are cold-blooded," said Mendez. "If the temperature dropped too low, they just shut off like a motor without gasoline. And there's nothing you can do about it—they just shut down. So there were restrictions—it would have been nice to have shot in slightly warmer weather; it would have been easier. But, hey, if it was easy, anybody could have done it."

Given the generous, four-month production schedule, along with Demme's reputation as a director open to input from both cast and crew, it's not surprising that consensus held the shoot as one of the smoothest in recent history. "He was terrific," said Neal Martz of the director. "Very pleasant, easy-going. He knew what he wanted but he took a lot of input—most of the big directors will do that."

"The beautiful thing about working with Demme," added Fullerton, "is that he is a person who will not allow himself to be rushed, who will explore many, many possibilities without allowing himself to run toward closure. He will go down to almost the last minute with free-form thinking, and keep his mind open. If the movie is a success on any level, it's because of him."

Mendez agreed. "Jonathan Demme and George Romero are two directors I've worked with that just have the same sort of karma about them. They're mellow. They know what they want. There's no head trips—it was great! Some people need to enlarge themselves by showing other people that they can boss them around. It wasn't an issue here. And as a result, you try twice as hard to please."

Concluded Martz, "Of course, between directing and editing you can make something or kill something. But the script itself was terrific. Demme was brilliant, the editor was terrific. It all worked." □



# REVIEWS

## The top-notch book becomes thoughtful, compelling shocker

### THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

An Orion Pictures release of a Strong Heart/Demme production. 2/91, 118 mins. In Dolby & color. Director, Jonathan Demme. Producers, Edward Saxon, Kenneth Utt, Ron Bozman. Executive producer, Gary Goetzman. Director of photography, Tak Fujimoto. Editor, Craig McKay. Production designer, Kristi Zea. Art director, Tim Galvin. Special makeup effects, Carl Fullerton, Neal Martz. Special effects, Dwight Benjamin-Creel. Costume designer, Colleen Atwood. Set decorator, Karen O'Hara. Music, Howard Shore. Sound, Christopher Newman. Screenplay by Ted Tally, based on the novel by Thomas Harris.

Clarice Starling ..... Jodie Foster  
Hannibal Lector ..... Anthony Hopkins  
Jack Crawford ..... Scott Glenn  
Jamie Gumb ..... Ted Levine  
Dr. Frederick Chilton ..... Anthony Heald  
Senator Ruth Martin ..... Diane Baker

by Dan Persons

Face it, no film could live up to the reputation *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* received just prior to its release. Admittedly, I took that reputation to heart, and went into the theatre expecting to be blown back into my seat. I wasn't, but by the end it didn't matter—the film's rewards run much deeper than a few transitory shocks. Yes, there are some dessicated corpses and a bit of extreme violence, but they aren't the film's strengths. Instead, director Jonathan Demme has taken the source material and turned out an intelligent, compelling product, the most thoughtful thriller to hit the screen in years.

Granted, Demme's source material was top-notch to begin with. Ostensibly a whodunit in the police-procedural mode, Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs* was a true genre-bender, a thriller that veered often from the formula and so confounded expectations that, even as it was delighting mystery fans, it was also coping awards (and controversy) as the best horror novel of 1988. Tightly written, surprising at every turn, the book became for many the proverbial one-night read. Wisely, Demme and his screenwriter, Ted Tally, have seen fit not to tamper extensively with the Harris scenario, turning out a screenplay that benefits greatly from its faithfulness.

At base, *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* is standard man-hunt, bordering on cliché: another deranged serial killer is on the



Anthony Hopkins in a powerful, otherworldly performance, taunting jailer Anthony Heald.

loose—the press has dubbed this one Buffalo Bill for his practice of skinning victims after death. What follows is no cliché. As in Harris' novel, the crimes and their investigation are mere stage dressing for a frequently disturbing examination of the many flavors of violation and betrayal. Harris doesn't play favorites, and Demme follows suit: everybody does everybody in this film. FBI chief Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn), despite his admiration for the abilities of rookie Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), does not hesitate to use her gender as a playing chip when trying to gain leverage over local police involved in the investigation. Starling, who struggles to conceal her West Virginia accent, isn't afraid to lay on the magnolias when intimidating a roomful of good ol' boy state troopers. Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill (played with great, creepy/wounded menace by Ted Levine) stalks the night, using a foot cast and an over-stuffed chair as bait to turn his victims' Samaritan impulses against them.

And they're all amateurs in comparison to imprisoned psychiatrist, Dr. Hannibal Lector—aka "Hannibal the Cannibal." As created by Harris, Lector stands as one of the most perfect evocations of pure evil in literature. As realized by Anthony Hopkins in a powerful, otherworldly perfor-

mance, Lector becomes the core of the movie, his presence felt even when he is off-screen (which he is for increasingly greater lengths of time.) Patient, manipulative, preternaturally intelligent, Dr. Lector is nothing less than the foremost practitioner of psychological rape. Almost by instinct, he knows how to get under a person's skin, touch the vulnerabilities there, bend them to his own design. "You don't want Hannibal Lector inside your head," Crawford warns Starling; yet, in the doctor slides, so adroitly that the victim doesn't realize until it is too late.

In a controlled, well-rounded performance, Foster plays agent-trainee Starling as a woman of profound complexities. Tough and driven, she's still novice enough to run the risk of being consumed alive—emotionally if not physically—by the ravenous Hannibal the Cannibal. Trapped into a deal whereby Lector will reveal clues to Bill's identity provided Starling answers his questions, the agent finds herself reliving the events that molded her almost compulsive desire for justice: early confrontations with death that left marks of guilt and desperation. Foster plays these scenes as a woman trapped in paradox, relieved to finally unburden herself of the weight of that guilt, mindful of the monster she's unburdening herself to.

There's a peculiar gleam to her eyes as she speaks—the look of someone shocked, yet almost gratified, to discover the hurt still very much alive within her.

At first blush, Jonathan Demme—a director perhaps best known for such "feel good" comedies as *MELVIN AND HOWARD* and for the superb concert film *STOP MAKING SENSE*—seems a peculiar choice for this material. What's overlooked is the edge Demme has brought to his previous efforts. In the third act of Demme's *SOMETHING WILD*, the screwball comedy suddenly (too suddenly for some audiences) metamorphoses into an intense brand of psychological horror, a kind of dress rehearsal for his work here. Demme juggles the

tact, verbal confrontations of Lector and Starling framed almost entirely in close-ups (not many directors have the guts or skill to get away with literally filling a Panavision frame with a person's face—this film's going to be a mess on video), to visceral, nightmarish sequences where we tour Bill's environs and examine the pit where he traps his victims. The contrast is startling, maybe too much so for some, but incredibly effective.

The role of Agent Crawford, and how his back-story (presented in Harris' previous novel *Red Dragon*, and filmed as *MAN-HUNTER*) ties him to both Lector and Starling, has been pushed into the background. This and other cuts strip away some of the layers of emotional complexity that raised the book above its competitors.

One could also take issue with the few directorial in-jokes, such as the strategic positioning of a copy of *Bon Appetit* magazine in Lector's cell—Hitchcockian humor without Hitchcock subtlety—or with an ending that replaces the book's disturbing, *diminuendo* finale with a more crowd-pleasing, but illogical, "Lector's revenge" fade-out. Even with that misstep, though, *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* remains one of the best thrillers to come around in a long time. □

## George Miller on Directing THE NEVERENDING STORY II

By Alan Jones

Six years have passed since director Wolfgang Petersen guided children of all ages through the imaginary Fantasia landscape of THE NEVERENDING STORY, based on Michael Ende's best-selling novel. THE NEVERENDING STORY II: THE NEXT CHAPTER was produced by Deiter Geissler, co-producer of the original, and directed by George Miller. No, not the George Miller, the creator of MAD MAX, but the other George Miller, who directed that other Australian boxoffice champ, THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER.

"It's very entertaining when journalists confuse us," smiled Miller, "It's a great way to catch people off-balance. I'm a great admirer of his work and know he likes what I do. I got his dentist bill once, so I can tell you all about his upper jaw but not much else! It's a mistake people can easily make—two people from the same town, Melbourne, in the same business with the same name."

Miller isn't Australian either, another mistake people make. 'I

Filming the full-sized mechanical Falkor in Germany, special creature effects supervised by Colin Arthur.



George Miller

was born in Edinburgh," he said. "My Scottish parents moved to Australia when I was three." Down Under Miller worked as an accountant before becoming a cameraman and director of TV productions. Miller said he knew THE NEVERENDING

STORY inside out, when he was approached to direct the sequel by Geissler. "It's my five-year-old son Geordie's favorite movie," said Miller. "He's seen it sixteen times."

The sequel, much like the original film, is only loosely based on the fantasy classic by Ende. "Based upon themes from the novel by Michael Ende" is how the credits put it. "Sounds like a line made up by lawyers to me," said Miller, who maintains his film is nevertheless faithful to Ende. "Its inspiration is the book and it's true to Ende's spirit. No movies based on books are the actual story, are they? A book is a book, a film a film, and that's the nature of the beast. I hear secondhand that Ende loves my picture more than the first and that makes me enormously proud."

THE NEXT CHAPTER was filmed in Munich, Germany, from a script written by THE SECRET OF THE THIRD REICH miniseries scribe Karin Howard after Geissler had artist Ludwig Angerer lay out basic visual and philosophical concepts. Despite Howard basing her work on Ende's German original, Miller made the Polish-born writer go through sixteen script drafts.

"I kept making a hundred thousand suggestions because if it ain't on the page, it'll never be on the stage," said Miller, who cited the ending where Bastian uses his last wish to give villainess Xayide a heart. "That's what a true hero would do, give up his final wish as a precious gift for Fantasia," said Miller. "I insisted the difference be drawn between a hero and a celebrity. Bastian is a hero because he sacrifices things for other people. The concept of heroes and sacrifice is irrevocably linked in my mind."

Miller maintained he also tried to focus on relationships. "There's drama in the growing relationship between Bastian



The villainous cast, Tri Face (Chris Burton), Xayide (Clarissa Burt) and Nimbley (Martin Umbach), and sumptuous production design by Gotz Weidner.

and his father, between Bastian and Atreyu, and between Bastian and himself as he sets off on this courageous quest," said Miller. "These bonds, dealing with common things to all races and denominations—heart, spirit and emotion, were of prime importance and uppermost in my mind to draw out of the story."

Thomas Hill, as Coreander the bookseller, is the only returning cast member from THE NEVERENDING STORY. "Barret Oliver and Noah Hathaway are far too old now to play the same characters," laughed Miller, "although that would have been an amusing concept. I didn't want to alienate audiences but did want to clear up who exactly Bastian was and who Atreyu was. In the first movie people got confused because they looked too similar. That's why I cast Jonathan Brandis, with his brown hair, against Kenny Morrison, with his darker color, so they would know the difference. We saw hundreds of actors for those two roles."

Because the German government prohibited the child actors from working more than three hours a day, Miller used additional cameras to get the coverage he needed. "Especially for the tricky shots with lots of special effects," he said.

THE NEXT CHAPTER was a massive undertaking for Miller, one that took two years out of his life. Miller termed it a happy experience with no major problems except that German crews did not understand the meaning of the word "Quiet." Noted Miller, "The great thing about special effects movies is you get to spend a lot of someone else's money. Everything cost a fortune but I always spent it responsibly. The Germans are only equipped to handle this sort of movie when you import a great special effects crew from England, like Derek Meddings and his 'Merrie Men.' The Germans are wonderful set designers but effects are the one area they haven't quite come to

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The castle of Fantasia's Childlike Empress, matte supervision by Al Whitlock.



## Minus a strong story, inspired fantasy moments just fall flat

### THE NEVERENDING STORY II

A Warner Bros release of a Time Warner Co. presentation. 10/90, 89 mins. In Dolby & color. Director, George Miller. Producer, Dieter Geissler. Executive producer, Tim Hampton. Director of photography, Dave Connell. Editors, Peter Hollywood & Chris Bhunden. Production designers, Bob Laing & Gotz Weidner. Special effects, Derek Meddings. Creature effects, Colin Arthur. Matte supervisor, Albert T. Whitlock. Costume designer, Heidi Weber. Music, Robert Folk, with songs by Giorgio Moroder. Sound, Chris Price. Stunt coordinator, Martin Grace. Screenplay by Karin Howard, based on the novel "The Neverending Story" by Michael Ende.

Bastian Bux ..... Jonathan Brandis  
Atreyu ..... Kenny Morrison  
Xayide ..... Clarissa Burt  
Childlike empress ..... Alexandra Jones  
Nimbly ..... Martin Umbach  
Barney Bux ..... John Wesley Shipp

by Allen Malmquist

Strike Two. Like its predecessor, *THE NEVERENDING STORY II* just never gets going. The movie plays like a storyboard, still pictures sketching out what will happen... but we never actually see any of it happen. At the climax, our hero Bastian plummets into a raging torrent and must swim for his very life, and on his own he journeys across Fantasia, but we don't get to see any of it.

Scenes which do get seen seem almost as absent. When giants crash up through the ground their attack turns on and off, instead of building up the momentum of a chase. When Atreyu confronts his evil-possessed friend, what should be a physically and emotionally charged struggle passes quickly as a lame tug-of-war. The great monstrous dragon, chased across land and air in furious pursuit, blows up in an out-of-nowhere third party wink-of-an-eye flash.

The story moves like this often. The dragon was done with, it got our heroes to the villain's castle fast, so get rid of it. The same with Bastian's loss of memory, serving only as a countdown to danger, to possible failure. When the boy has only two memories left, those of his father and mother, why does he still know Atreyu and Falkor, still remember himself, still remember what he's doing?—which is precisely what Xayide meant for him to forget when she started stealing his mind. The filmmakers appear to have suffered a memory loss of their own.

Bastian's wishing medallion makes a little sense. Why not just wish himself inside the castle? Why not just wish the monsters away? The movie moves on blissfully unaware of itself, never tak-



Jonathan Brandis as Bastian, flying astride Falkor, kiddie fodder that betrays its source.

ing what would be just a moment to establish some sort of limit to Bastian's powers. Such neglect breaks the most basic law of fantasy.

And destroys the film's major theme. Considering Bastian's fear of the multi-meter diving board in this film's real world intro, Bastian's build-up of courage should have been the film's focus. But as it stands, wishes serve the plot, not Bastian, and his growth is as haphazard as his story. The movie's jumble of trite "I miss my

Mommy" and "Daddy doesn't pay attention to me" scenes could have served as motives to support its theme of courage. That would have given Bastian's climactic sacrifice of his mother's memory to save Atreyu more potency and could have provided a source for his ingenious but out-of-the-blue one wish solution to Fantasia's devastation—"Xayide, I wish you to have a heart."

Instead of developing its themes, *THE NEVERENDING STORY II* just tosses out tidbits with a

great deal of visual flourish. There are lots of nice touches, from a belt with eye and shutter, to feet-first invisibility, from "The Castle Shaped Like a Hand" to the wished-for steps sprouting magically from it. But without a strong story in support, Fantasia's moments of inspired fancy fall flat, overwhelmed by boring masked people waving robes around, and a birdman little better than the chicken you might see at a baseball game.

The characters don't grab one's attention either. The film's beautiful but boring villain and her fowl sidekick are verse fantasy figures with too little development to make much of an impression. And it's hard to find good child

actors. The dramatic moments between our boy heroes—though part of the fault simply lies in the writing—come off as painfully acted. Jonathan Brandis has a shrill edge as Bastian and Kenny Morrison's Atreyu is bland. Noah Hathaway in the first *NEVERENDING STORY* did a better job of being serious, earnest, but still likeable.

The 1984 feature has that going for it, plus a greater wealth of wonders and a less convoluted

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### Boxoffice Survey: Horror Dominates Genre's 30.2% Share

An analysis of the Top Grossing Films as reported in *Variety's* "Weekend Boxoffice Report" reveals that in the first quarter of 1991 revenue from horror, fantasy and science fiction films accounted for 30.2% of all money earned at the boxoffice (31.4% last year). Genre films comprised 21.6% of the weekly listings.

Revenue from horror films is up by 84% over last year in the weekend boxoffice sampling. Films responsible for the horror surge are this year's genre blockbusters *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* and *SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY*, in addition to the continuing boxoffice power of last year's *MISERY*, a hit at Christmas. Fantasy revenues saw a slight decrease, earning 3.6% less than last year. Science fiction boxoffice revenues, represented by just

#### TOP GENRE FILMS OF '91

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (Ori, h, 11)	\$108,662,853
SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY (Par, h, 12)	\$91,081,658
TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II (NI, f, 6)	\$70,560,411
MISERY (Co, h, 22)	\$49,031,595
EDWARD SCISSORHANDS (Fox, f, 17)	\$26,723,705
LOOK WHO'S TALKING TOO (Tst, f, 20)	\$18,379,048
THE NEVERENDING STORY PART II (Wb, f, 12)	\$16,935,746
GHOST (Par, f, 41)	\$11,391,083
NOTHING BUT TROUBLE (Wb, f, 10)	\$8,443,020
WARLOCK (Trmk, h, 16)	\$8,633,371
ALICE (Ori, f, 13)	\$6,497,569
THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER (Bv, f, 22)	\$6,115,554
EVE OF DESTRUCTION (Ori, sf, 4)	\$4,704,884
POPCORN (Sis, h, 2)	\$3,965,000
ALMOST AN ANGEL (Par, f, 5)	\$1,854,702
PREDATOR 2 (Fox, sf, 9)	\$1,516,228
THE THIRD ANIMATION CELEBRATION (Exp, f, 18)	\$975,400
JACOB'S LADDER (Trl, h, 14)	\$826,578
THE VANISHING (Tara, h, 13)	\$527,681
MEET THE APPLIGATES (Trtn, f, 2)	\$445,000
THE BRITISH ANIMATION INVASION (Exp, f, 9)	\$352,584

two titles (ten last year), was negligible.

In the first quarter, science fiction films accounted for 1.6% of all films and less than one percent (.56%) of all receipts; fantasy films accounted for 12% of all films and 12.3% of receipts; while horror films accounted for 8% of all films and 17.3% of receipts.

The total U.S. and Canadian boxoffice take of the top-grossing genre films in the *Variety* totals are listed at right (through 5/6). For purposes of breakdown by genre, titles are indicated as horror (h), fantasy (f), and science fiction (sf), followed by number of weeks each title made the "Weekend Boxoffice Report" since January. Films first released in 1990 are indicated by an \*, but figures listed do not include prior year earnings.



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## BILL AND TED

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finding a new financing partner, D.E.G., who signed Steve Herek to direct. "They wanted to change the van, because they thought it was too close to *BACK TO THE FUTURE*," said Solomon. "Of course, it ended up nothing like *BACK TO THE FUTURE*. Steve [Herek] came up with the idea of a phone booth. Nobody at the studio had heard of *DR. WHO*, but I have to honestly say that I actually didn't know about it myself."

The casting of Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves resulted in a slight modification in the characters, who were originally to be unpopular nerd-geeks. "Bill and Ted were conceived in our minds as these fourteen-year-old skinny guys, with low-rider bellbottoms and heavy metal t-shirts," said Solomon. "We actually had a scene that was even shot, with Bill and Ted walking past a group of popular kids who hate them. But once you cast Alex and Keanu, who look like pretty cool guys, that was hard to believe."

D.E.G. went bankrupt before they could finish *BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE* and were in the process of selling the film directly to HBO for cable airing when it was rescued by Rick Finkelstein, a former D.E.G. executive who had moved to Nelson Entertainment. Nelson made D.E.G. an offer that was slightly better than what D.E.G. would have gotten from HBO, and put \$1 million into the film to complete its effects and do some reshooting prompted by favorable audience previews. Nelson sold it to Orion for release and the rest, as they say, is history.

Though a hit with teenagers in theatres, the film eventually reached a broader audience on video, the audience for which Matheson and Solomon had intended it. Recalled Solomon, "I wanted to go to everyone who's ever seen it and say, 'I'm sorry—the movie could have been a lot better.'"

"A lot of the mall stuff we weren't real happy with. Some of it is okay, but I found Joan of Arc doing aerobics excruciating to watch. Our idea was to put Lincoln and Freud in a room together and have them play foosball, as opposed to the continuing pressure, which was, 'Lincoln should give a speech like his Gettysburg Address.' We always tried to do the weirder, less obvious choice.

"I'm not saying that people who like it are idiots; I just wish they could have seen a version that really let loose."

Maybe, with *BILL AND TED GO TO HELL*, they can. □

## BETTY PAGE

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supportive of her former spouse. "I'm very proud of Dave," Stevens said. "He's worked very hard, and richly deserves his success. I'm also proud to have somehow contributed to the very foundation and creation of his comic book character. In a sense, I look upon Jennifer Connelly as playing a 19-year-old version of me. But what that character has become, in the Disney movie, isn't me and because of that I no longer feel any attachment to it." □

## COMMANDO CODY REVISITED

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stock footage, were written by one man—Republic routinely employed as many as six writers for a single serial!—whose main skill was probably an encyclopedic knowledge of the Republic stock footage library. Republic also recycled a key prop in *ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE*, the clunky, if effective robot, first seen in the studio's *MYSTERIOUS DR. SATAN* (1940).

In *KING OF THE ROCKET MEN*, research scientist Jeff King (get it?) matches wits with The Vulcan, a traitorous saboteur who secretly is a member of the foundation that employs King. King is abetted by newspaper reporter Glenda Thomas (the by-then 41-year-old, former leading lady of the original *FRANKENSTEIN*, Mae Clarke).

The storylines of *RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON* and *ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE* are virtual carbon copies of *KING OF THE ROCKET MEN*, their primary alteration being the substitution of aliens (and their hoodlum pawns) for conventional spies. The heroine in the second and third serials is Aline Towne, a demurely sexy brunette whose presence was merely functional: she plays the foundation's secretary. Although Towne gets to wear a form-fitting outfit and fly to the moon with the boys (in a sleek, Lydecker-designed rocket ship) in *RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON* (and utters an achingly sexist line about preparing their meals), she barely steps out from behind her desk in *ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE*.

In none of the serials is either Clarke or Towne a romantic heroine; the films are pitched squarely at the pre-pubescent male viewer who hasn't yet discovered girls (although it's worth noting that Glenda Thomas is an ahead-of-her-time, take-charge leading lady). This places them both in stark contrast to the Betty

Page pin-up heroine of *The Rocketeer* comic, who is an idealized personification of male adolescent sex fantasies (as was the *real* Bette Page of '50s cheesecake magazines). □

## ROCKETEER DIRECTOR

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Stevens. "We agreed on almost everything, since *THE ROCKETEER* was leaving the realm of the printed page and turning into something that was entirely new," said Johnston. "Dave didn't try to influence my interpretation of his original work, and that let me concentrate on hitting the essence of what made the character so appealing for me. But when shooting began, it became very difficult to brainstorm with the writers. As a result, night-before revisions and on-set ad-libbing were commonplace."

Essentially, *THE ROCKETEER* centers around a flying special effect, but Johnston said his ILM know-how didn't help. "Whenever possible, I ignored my background as an effects supervisor," he said. "My main experience at Lucasfilm was designing action sequences and interfacing them with the films. Doing a picture like *THE ROCKETEER* was really no different than doing a two million dollar story with four characters. You still have to control everything that goes through the lens.

"But when you've got a big film like *THE ROCKETEER*, you need the World's Best Movie Crew, which I had, of course. Their talents really came into play during the aerial sequences. Since I couldn't go up and shoot from the camera plane myself, it became a matter of giving the flying cinematographer extensive storyboards, then waiting on the ground to see what he came back with."

Despite two comic book projects in a row—*HONEY ISHRUNK THE KIDS* in form if not origin—Johnston expressed no fear of being typed. "I think that filmmakers are only marked if they let themselves be," he said. "I made *THE ROCKETEER* because I loved the material, not for the money. After all, we're dealing with Disney here."

During post-production, Johnston was more concerned with making *THE ROCKETEER* fly than contemplating future projects. "I have none," he said while working on the film's complicated visuals at ILM, his old alma mater. And Johnston remained tight-lipped about how the *Rocketeer* would jet about 1938 L.A. "ILM? What ILM? This guy really flies!" he joked. **Daniel Schweiger**

## NEVER ENDING STORY

continued on page 58

grips with. I will never forget the support Derek gave me. If I ever had any worries over how an effects scene would work, I'd jump on my bike, go to his workshop, and after the inevitable conversation about cricket, talk it over in depth with him. He was a tower of strength."

Miller also had a good working relationship with returning creature effects designer Colin Arthur. "We'd talk design, then six months down the line I'd see it in three dimensions," said Miller. "Then we'd change it to make it work. The baby Rock Biter was a good example of the constant to-ing and fro-ing we'd do. The costume just about fit the actor, but he kept falling over in it, so it was back to the drawing board to get that one right."

It was also back to Miller's son Geordie to divine which creatures from the original should make a reappearance in the sequel. "Geordie talked to his friends and the favorites by popular opinion were Falkor the flying Luckdragon and the Rock Biter," said Miller. "Newcomers Nimbly the bizarre bird, Xayide, Tri Face and some wonderful giants fleshed out the creatures we knew audiences really liked."

According to Miller, the fantasy of THE NEXT CHAPTER also has a serious side. "It's all to do with Orin, the talisman Bastian takes from the book cover," said Miller. "It's what grants him his wishes. But with that comes a certain responsibility. You can't just have everything you want. There is a cost. When Bastian makes a wish he loses a precious memory, sucked out by an evil machine Xayide has built. Wishes, like drugs, can make your fantasies come true, but they take something away at the same time. That's the real reason for The Emptiness, the price he must pay. Those complexities give the story an edge and broad appeal across the age spectrum. The younger kids get a good-time romp while their parents can pick up on the moral aspects.

"As a director, I feel I have a certain responsibility not just to entertain but to say something worthwhile and positive. I want to leave a body of work behind me I can be proud of. I made THE NEVER ENDING STORY II: THE NEXT CHAPTER for my son, for my father, for everybody's sons and fathers. It's an adventure through the imagination without guns or being chock-full of violence. If this classic story, and my previous films, deem me as a family movie maker, so be it." □

## THE BONEYARD

continued from page 31

James did the budget, because I had never done a budget before. I looked at it and said, 'Where's the fuckup money?' And James said, 'There is no fuckup money. We can't afford mistakes. From that point on it was panic.

"Let me give you an idea," continued Corso. "James wanted this little girl to be the most pathetic thing ever seen. She had these fake legs, these tiny skeletal arms, and she was supposed to have this elaborate scene. It was going to be a dream sequence, and she was going to sing a little song, and at the end of the song she smiles and her head splits open. Well, we got it set up and we ended up having no time to shoot it at all."

The razor-edged filming schedule cut into other plans as well: The Poopinplatz ghou, which Corso originally envisioned as a puppet with huge spindly legs, ended up as a man in a suit, limiting the creature's non-human look. And the Floosom ghou proved unwieldy. "It was too big to fit in the whole frame," said Corso. "And we didn't have time to shoot the legs. I wanted to show it stepping over bodies."

The Diller ghou was Corso's favorite and his biggest letdown. "Phyllis was the one thing that I was really excited about doing," said Corso. "But things were so rushed that I was actually putting the epoxy on the creature as we walked on the set. There was no time."

Welcome to the wonderful world of makeup effects, where time is money and a designer's soul is forfeit. Corso, though, said he's happy with some things. "I was happy with the little dead girl," he said. "And I liked Phyllis, though I would have liked to see her done differently. But really, just the fact that we ended up finishing it on time was amazing. If it looks half-way decent, I'll thank God."

Summed up Corso, who lost ten pounds and gained the flu during the shoot: "It was a really ambitious project, and if everybody had just a little more experience, we may have been able to pull it off... in a dream."

For Cummins, the film's payoff lies in the possibility of increased support for his next project, something he termed "a straight piece of Americana," tentatively called WINDSTORM. Cummins is close-mouthed about the project, but said he would never do it under the circumstances in which THE BONEYARD was made. "It's insane to do a film in five weeks and expect people to kill themselves for you. I don't think I'll do it again." □

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# LETTERS

## NOT THE "AUTEUR" OF POPCORN

Your article on my "derailment" from POPCORN [21:5:28] quotes [producer Howard] Hurst saying we were running "terribly overtime and over budget." In truth, the budget as well as the schedule had been grossly misrepresented by the executive producer, Bob Clark, from the beginning. The script—as written and approved—could never have been made for the \$3.5 million set at the start. When I left the picture, it had crept up to the more realistic \$6 million and according to trade reports, it finally came in at \$9 million.

Clark has also misrepresented and downplayed his own involvement in POPCORN, since it was reportedly *he*—and not Mark Herrier, as credited—who actually completed the film. When I left, Clark offered me a chance to remain on as his "stooge." I declined. Mr. Herrier—no stranger to type-casting—accepted. I think this puts his quoted remarks in their proper light. How else to explain a director who doesn't know whether his film is a comedy or a thriller? As for Herrier's comments on my direction of Amy

O'Neil, I can only point to the usually effective Jill Schoelen's critically savaged performance and let the viewer decide for himself who was misdirected.

Re: *Auteurship*—my name nowhere appears in the credits of POPCORN. I removed it for several reasons: a) I was horrified by the botch that had been made of what might have been a quirky, interesting genre piece; b) I was denied credit by the producers for the only work of mine which does survive intact in the body of the film, namely, the four '50s style mini-movies; c) I was never paid for my work and saw no reason to allow whatever credibility my name possesses to be exploited for the profit of people I consider to be dishonest and unethical.

Let me state unequivocally that POPCORN as completed does not represent my vision or my intentions either as writer or director, and in fact it violates them crudely and ineptly. I would therefore greatly appreciate it if you would desist from identifying me as this film's "auteur" and put the credit where it belongs—on the shoulders of Clark and Herrier.

Alan Ormsby  
Van Nuys, CA 91401

## TERMINATOR 2

continued from page 7

searching for a computer chip at Cyberdyne Systems, the defense contractor responsible for the computer network of sophisticated machines that eventually overthrows mankind, culminating in the nuclear annihilation of Los Angeles.

Lost in all the "bigness" according to one Hollywood observer—who hadn't read the script—is the human dimension of the original, which climaxed with Hamilton facing down her robot assassin. The sequel ends with Schwarzenegger battling Key 1000. "It's just two machines bashing away at each other," said the source. "Who cares?" □

## NEVERENDING STORY

continued from page 59

theme and plot structure, but it doesn't add up to much either. Both films mangle Michael Ende's book. Why Ende allowed his name to be used on the second film when he demanded it be removed from the first is a mystery. NEVERENDING STORY II has little to do with the second half of Ende's novel, its supposed source.

All in all, both films are eminently forgettable and will be remembered only because of children's never-ending appetite for video fodder. □

## CHILD'S PLAY 3

continued from page 9

puppeteers with joysticks allowing them to manipulate the lips so they can coordinate jaw movements with lip movements to enunciate all the syllables.

"In the past couple films, the puppeteer would maybe get it on the first or second take, but on the third, he might screw up. Now, Kevin Yagher has computerized it so they lock it in once they have it, and once they do, they get it precisely every time."

Added Mancini, "Yagher and the puppeteers are really the unsung heroes of these movies. The whole thing would fall apart if Chucky didn't work, and this time it's so wonderful and believable."

On the subject of whether there will be further CHILD'S PLAY sequels with Andy fending off future attacks from the series' lethal Lilliputian, Bender noted, "Well, I guess there is always a follow-up. At the end of this, we definitely leave the door open." □

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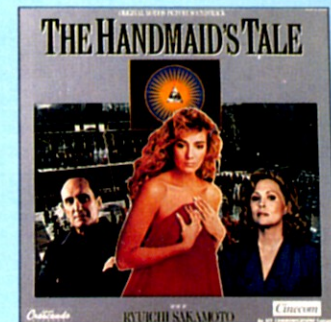
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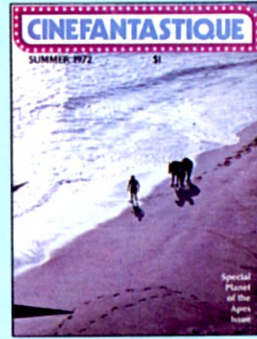
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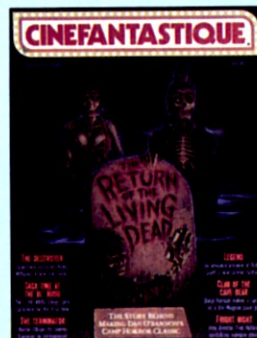
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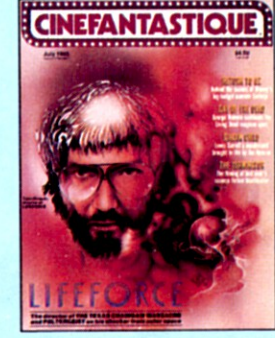
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